



アルティナ

11

はげんのこうき
アルティナ
ALTEENA
the Sword Princess

皇覇姫剣の

XI

Yukiya Murasaki
むらさきゆきや
III. himesuz

覇剣の皇姫
アルティーナ
XI
ALTINA
the Sword Princess





大剣使いの第四皇女
アルティーナ

「ラトレイユに
話を聞きに行くわ」

騎士団長
アビダルエヴラ

皆の視線がアルティーナに向かう。

彼女は呆然として座ったままではなかった。

椅子から立ちあがる。

要塞守備隊長
エヴラール

わっ！と幕僚たちが沸いた。

「うわー!! 美味しい!」

リナルド・バンドウ
傭兵団《吊られた狐》射手
フランツィスカ

読書狂の軍師
レジス

ティラソラヴェルデ家の次女
ファンリーヌ

「うんうん、甘いお菓子なんて久しぶりですわね」

レジスは甘くて丸いドーナツをかじりながら、
女性とは大変なものだな、と考えるのだった。

「まだ満足のいく作品は書けてないけど……
なかなか、カッコイイ主人公が思いつかなくてな」

ベルガリア帝国第三皇子
バスティアン

「バスティアン、その辺にしておくです。
大切な話があるのではなかったのですか？」

ハイブリタニア王国正統後継者
エリーゼ

「なるほど、たしかに、それは重要だね。
最近の流行りだと」

ALTINA

the Swords Princess



Recap

Regis Auric was a young soldier who was bad at swordsmanship, horsemanship and only knew how to read. After being exiled to the borders, he met a crimson eyed and vermillion haired girl——Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria. Nicknamed Altina.

Her mother was a commoner and because of that she was banished from the courts. Despite being just 14 years of age, her status as royalty elevated her to the position of commander of the border regiment. She did not lament her fate, instead resolving herself to change the Empire for the citizens oppressed by the tyrannical government.

“I want to be the Empress, lend me your wisdom and swear fealty to me.”

In order to let others acknowledge her position as commander, Altina challenged the de facto commander, the hero Jerome to a duel, and achieved the final victory.

Although Regis still lacked confidence in himself, he still promised to be her strategist.

The two of them went through all sorts of crisis.

The attack of the barbarians.

Taking the invulnerable Fort Volks.

Attending the ‘Empire’s founding day festival’ in the capital...

As the throne inheritance right troubled the Belgarian Empire, they were forced to face the declaration of war from the neighbouring High Britannia.

At the same time, Fort Volks was assaulted by Varden Grand Duchy.

Under the masterful planning of Regis, they crushed the enemy's attack in just one night. And in the 'Battle of Lafressange' that followed, they aided the Seventh Imperial Army in their retreat.

While the Imperial forces were shrouded in the despair of their disadvantages, Regis smashed apart the High Britannia's 'Queen's Navy' as the acting Fleet Admiral, cutting off the enemy's supply line successfully.

He then shattered the supply unit led by the Mercenary King Gilbert, making the decisive chess move that would lead to the Empire's victory.

Second Prince Latreille, who took charge of the capital's defences, saw the depraved sight of the Emperor lavishing himself with luxuries even as the nation was in imminent danger. Unable to control his rage, he swung his blade 'Arme Victoire Volonte' down...

At the same time, he disguised his regicide as the Emperor passing from old age.

The fortress city Grebauvar located to the north was captured by the combined forces of the Langobalt Kingdom army and the remnants of the High Britannia army. Answering Latreille's call for aid, Regis participated in the fight to take back the city—— In order to execute Regis' plan, 3rd Grade Combat Officer Vallis infiltrated Grebauvar city.

With the help of a girl named Felicia, he rescued the captives successfully.

In the final battle, Regis obtained the authority to command the First Imperial Army from Latreille. Not only did he utilize his knowledge from books, he also made use of his battle experience so far and finally defeated the Langobalt Army.

And by making use of a large scale mechanical device, he flooded Grebauvar city and forced the enemy to surrender.

During the battle, Regis realized that the enemy commander had fled with his sharp observation of the enemy's movement and proposed a pursuit.

Latreille personally led his cavalry to pursue and finally forced the Queen of High Britannia to a corner. Although the enemy commander Oswald attempted to turn the situation around by himself, he ultimately fell under Latreille's sword.

With her retreat cut off, Queen Margaret attempted suicide but was saved by Regis.

The war between the Empire and High Britannia ended with

victory for the Empire.

However, Regis' intellect was a serious threat in the eyes of Latreille.

"Kill... Regis d'Auric."

The knights of the First Imperial Army drew their blades.

But at this moment, another assailant appeared before Regis.

Prologue: The Corpse of Regis d'Auric

Field Marshall Allen Deux Latreille de Belgaria had a band of absolutely loyal escort knights.

Even when he assassinated the Emperor, they were by his side.

They received orders to assassinate Regis d'Auric and gripped their swords tight.

The one who relayed this order was the right hand man of the Prince, Chief Strategist Germain Laurentis de Beaumarchais.

Of course, this command can't be made known to too many people. They even had to avoid the attention of the soldiers from within the First Army.

Hence, their numbers were limited to 30. They might be few, but every one of them were the strongest of the elites.

It was obviously overdoing it for the assassination of a strategist who couldn't even wield a sword. That should be the case.

Most of the staff officers stayed in tents near the headquarters, not far from Latreille's quarters.

But Regis d'Auric felt distanced from the group and stayed in a tent a bit far away from there.

Large tents that could accommodate several soldiers were scattered here and there.

Normally, the soldiers would be sleeping by now. However, they were drinking heartily because of the grand victory today. It was dangerous to light a fire near their tents, so everyone headed to the riverside and celebrated beside the bonfire.

Even so, there should be guards near the tents...

One of the knights muttered softly.

"...What's going on? There's no one here?"

"Indeed..."

Usually this would be a trivial matter, but for the group tasked with this secret mission, this was very alarming.

Everyone hastened their pace.

Like beasts stalking their prey, they closed in on the target's tent.

The torches in their left hand illuminated the surroundings.

If their light source wasn't the flickering torches but the bright sunlight, they might notice the countless footprints around this tent.

And right now, these tracks had been covered by this group of knights.

This tent could hold accommodate 6 people and was big enough for a 3rd Grade Admin Officer, but too small for a staff officer. They surrounded the tent.

It was allocated for the strategist Regis and that female General Affairs Officer. The maids attending to his needs were staying in another place.

The knights in front gave each other a look as a signal.

And drew their swords quietly.

—— They would kill the target first. Then the female General Affairs Officer. If the maids were present, they would kill them too. Finally, they would burn down the tent.

While his achievement made it no exaggeration to call the

strategist the messiah of the Empire, he was so powerful that he became a threat to their lord. They must not let him live.

The knights entered the tent.

“Sir Regis d’Auric! Prepare yourself!”

They might be assassins, but they were knights too. Hence, they raised their voice.

It was pitch black in the tent and the lights were out.

They illuminated the area with their torches.

Only one of the two makeshift beds had a blanket on it. From the bulging shape, someone should be sleeping there.

Were the two of them were sleeping on the same bed?

—— *Such things do happen.* The knight raised his sword.

“Sir Strategist, you are awake right!?”

They wanted to grant him the goodwill of stating his last words... But that wasn’t it. The real reason was this staff officer tent. If they realized they ‘got the wrong man’ after stabbing with their swords, it would be a grave problem.

No reaction.

Was he sleeping soundly after experiencing that intense battle?

“Hey, get him up!”

“Y-Yes Sir!”

Heeding his orders, the lowest ranked knight drew near the bed.

He strode forth openly.

But he was actually tensed, as if he was extending his arm towards a beast.

They heard that the strategist had weaker swordsmanship than a child. During battles, he didn't even carry a sword, much less armour. This should be easier than strangling a rabbit.

However, he was known by chilling names like 'Magician' or 'Monster'. The strategist that achieve a number of miraculous victories. Just in the battle earlier in the day, he toyed with the enemy forces with his terrifying and precise commands.

It would be strange to find him defenceless.

The young knight felt an invisible wall between him and the bed.

—— *Is this a trap?*

His forehead was sweating.

He could feel the pressure from the knights behind him.

He couldn't bring himself to run away.

The young knight stepped forth cautiously, grabbed the blanket with his trembling hand and pull it off.

Revealing a bloody corpse.

“Uwaaaahhhhhhh———!!”

The knight back away with a start, then tripped and fell.

The older knight who gave the order opened his eyes wide.

“What happened!?”

He rushed forth in a panic.

The corpse was wearing a dark green uniform. As this was

the uniform used by the Imperial Fourth Army (formerly the Beilschmidt Border Regiment), it was obvious that Regis d'Auric was the only one who would wear it in the First Imperial Army.

This was undoubtedly the target.

But there was no way to confirm his face.

Because the corpse's head was missing.

Even the knights who had experienced countless battles and seen plenty of corpses felt like puking.

The Knight Escorts started panicking.

They came to assassinate him. In that sense, their objectives had been completed without them needing to carry it out. That wasn't a problem.

But who did this?

Who cut off the head?

Was this corpse really the target?

The guards around the tent were missing, but there should be at least two to three layers of security separating this place

from the outside.

If nobody was found, then it means it was the work of someone inside?

“What about that woman!?”

“Ah!”

She was Fanrine Veronica de Tirasio Laverde.

If that was the case, her motives would be unclear. She appeared to be despatched by the Ministry of Military Affairs to monitor the strategist and her House was aligned with the Fourth Princess. She had reasons to protect the strategist, but no motives to kill him.

There were no signs of her, was it done by that woman?

“—— Uwah!?”

One of the knights searching the tent yelled.

“What’s the matter!?”

“L-Look at this!”

He pushed the water tank over.

There was a headless corpse inside. Not just that, it didn't have arms and the torso was covered in wounds, distorting it beyond recognition. Despite being covered in blood, the dress it was wearing seemed to be of high quality. It probably belonged to the General Affairs Officer.

Was this corpse that hated?

—— Was this done by someone bearing a huge grudge?

Or maybe someone else ordered this assassination? And the head was taken back as proof of accomplishing the job?

They came too late—— That's the fact. Being worked up over it would just deepen their shame.

“Stay on guard here. I will report this to Chief Strategist Beaumarchais.”

“What about just burning the tent like this?”

“What?”

“Even if we don't know who did this, the end result is the same. We just need to burn it all down.”

“Well... although it won't make any difference...”

“The main objective of assassinating the strategist is completed... We can’t let bad rumours spread amongst the ranks.”

Indeed, if the group of knights surround this tent while he was seeking advice from the Chief Strategist—— it was clear what the soldiers would think.

Another man raised his voice too.

“It’s fine to report after setting the fire!”

The other knights nodded in agreement.

An appropriate course of action.

“... That’s true.”

After pressing the torch onto the table where the candles were, it caught on fire immediately.

They then torched the bed where the corpse laid.

All this would burn to crisp in no time.

The Knight Escorts stared at the body on the bed.

“... It’s too horrible an end for the strategist that saved the Empire.”

Before dawn——

Inside the dim tent, Germaine whispered.

“They report the plan to be a success.”

Latreille exhaled.

“Is that so...”

“As expected, you still feel it is a pity?”

“... Am I? Maybe it’s more appropriate to say that I am relieved to have buried my strongest foe. But I do feel the sensation of loss. Is it from losing a worthy opponent, or lamenting the lost of such a talent?”

“I see.”

“But, there is one thing I am sure of—— The strategist I can trust is you.”

Germaine froze for a moment.

“... Erm... Does it look like I am jealous?”

“I can feel that you are uneasy, because the look in your eyes changed... Or rather, I can feel that you are revealing your intangible thoughts.”

“I actually...”

Latreille clenched his fist.

“Don’t worry. I am not foolish enough to hesitate on who I should trust.”

“Y-Yes my liege... my apologies.”

Germaine laid out a blank piece of parchment.

“Prince Latreille, should we notify the Fourth Army about this?”

“... Yes... We need to.”

He momentarily thought about saying ‘I will leave this to you’, but Latreille decided to do this himself. Because this was a troublesome manner, he didn’t want to push it to his subordinate.

“... Because of circumstances beyond my control, 3rd Grade Admin Officer Regis d’Auric was killed in action on the field of

battle. I am incredibly saddened by his loss.”

“I have noted it down. I will sent a messenger to the Fourth Army with haste—— What about the remains and his personal effects? Although they had more or less been burned...”

“Just process it as normal.”

“Understood. Oh right, we will need to send this to his next of kin.”

“Does he have a wife or any children?”

“He seems to have a sister who has been married off to Rouen city. That seems to be all. I don’t know if he has any side chick though.”

“Hmm...”

“With all that he had achieved, it wouldn’t be strange for him to have a fiancée... Our spies didn’t send us any such intel though. He appears to mainly stay indoors to work on his day off, or just read books.”

“Enough, just send it to his sister.”

He didn’t want to hear about the daily life of the man that had already been assassinated.

Germaine lowered his head.

“Yes my Prince.”

—— *He will read books whenever he has time huh.*

Was this the reason behind his outstanding talent?

“He just died without any counter tactics huh... It feels unsettling. I am not questioning the loyalty of my Knight Escorts, but that strategist would always think of strategies that exceed our imagination.”

“That was true—— Let’s issue an order to secure the perimeters of the camp, and send search party out into the forest. Tell them to be wary of people leaving the camp.”

“Yes... But we can’t use the reason that we are searching for the strategist?”

“Use the reason that High Britannian captives had escaped. We suspect that they had help from the inside, so no one is permitted to leave the camp—— Just give this order.”

“That should be fine. Well done.”

“Thank you very much. I will relay the orders right away.”

Germaine saluted and left the tent.

Latreille leaned back onto his chair alone and looked up at the sky.

“He’s dead huh... If I had done things better, maybe things would have turned out differently? Once again, I... lost someone I wanted so badly.”

He pulled open a drawer and took out a small wooden board.

It was a painting.

But it was smaller than normal paintings, just the size of a palm. On the canvas was —— a woman with black haired tied up by a hair band with floral patterns. She wore a wide apron, and held a colour palette and brush in hand.

Latreille sighed.

“Beatrice... I won’t let you wait too long...”

Intermission

Imperial year 851, August 6th——

Eleven days had passed since Latreille received the report of Regis' death. Fort Volks.

Eddie sat down onto the grass weakly.

“Fuah——...”

Thump, Altina stabbed her sword down into the ground.

“Hmmm... If I performed that action this way... Yup, it will be better.”

“It's getting worse recently.”

Eddie said with a sigh.

Altina tilted her head.

“What?”

“I'm talking about you. It seems that your body is becoming

more grown-up?”

“Ehhh!?”

“It was incredibly flat before, but the places that should protrude are sticking out now!”

“W... What!?”

Altina backed away unconsciously, her arms before her chest.

Eddie clenched his fist tightly.

“Muscles! Your muscles are bulging!”

“.... Huh? Ah, right.”

“As expected, even the body of girls would change when they reach 15. I could feel the weight behind your blow much more than before.”

“R-Right... It’s Eddie after all. That scared me...”

Frankly speaking, this man was a sword nerd. The Fifth Princess Felicia also had a screw loose. She would dress like a man and disguise herself as the First Prince Auguste, the two of them would act so intimately that strange rumours were spreading amongst the soldiers.

And of course, Eddie didn't know what Altina thought and continued:

"I can't hold back from now on. One false move and I might cleave off your arm during training."

"So you know how to compliment others huh, how rare."

"I am not complimenting you, this is just a proper evaluation — As the man with the title 'Sword Emperor', I admit that you have grown stronger."

"Hmm? I do feel I have grown a lot."

"Of course... Not just me, you have trained with grandpa who is the former Sword Emperor, and that Mercenary King that much."

"Although Gilbert can only use a wooden sword. Evrard absolutely forbid him from using any other weapon."

"The risk of giving a real sword to a prisoner is too great."

"It will be fine if I don't lose right?"

"... No... Well, if it is the present Argentina, it should be fine to say this. You don't seem lost anymore."

“What?”

“You felt lost some time ago right?”

Ahh, Altina flicked her hair.



“During the war with High Britannia, I had been relying on Regis all the time right? Even when I heard about Latreille becoming Emperor, all I could do was cry.”

“I think that couldn’t be helped. After all, Latreille had the advantage in age, achievement, backing and order of succession. He is also a man. Frankly speaking, his background was completely different from you.”

“Yes. But Regis said he will not give up. So, I won’t give up either.”

“And then?”

“That’s the problematic part—— What should we do?”

“You are still a dummy.”

“Boo—”

Altina puffed out her cheeks.

Eddie said seriously:

“Latreille had always been smarter right?”

“Hmmp, all just pretty words! In the end, all he is saying is

‘defeat the enemy’ right?”

“No no——... He had put a lot of thought into reforming the army. Not just his adjutant, he also gathered experts in politics, economics and religion for a discussion.”

“Right, I agree that relying on smart people is the right move. After all, even if I study now, I won’t be smarter than the smart people now right? I mean within this year or two.”

“Haha, that’s not true. It’s not possible even if you spend more than three years.”

“Hey you... It’s still possible okay? I am studying properly right now!? Well, I think it’s better to tap on the wisdom of others for now.”

“So that means leaving it all to Regis?”

“Hmm... Well, if he gets overwhelmed with work, Regis will fall sick again, so we need to hire other people. Let’s gather some of them... But we will only know if they could be of use after Regis returns.”

“Indeed. For issues relating to Admin Officers, it would be better to decide after he comes back.”

“Yup—— And so, I need to do the things only I can do! It’s decided then!”

Altina puffed out her chest.

Eddie shrugged.

“Which is, swordsmanship?”

“We are fighting for the sake of peace. If we can settle the issue through negotiation, I will leave it to Regis. And when I am needed... that would be for times when things could only be resolved through battle right?”

“Oh, that’s true! Even Argentina would have times when she thinks things through—”

“Fufufu... And so, I will train my skills with the sword. For the times when he needs might. This might sound strange—— but it’s also for times when Regis need protection.”

The two of them smiled wryly.

“Hey, isn’t it weird for the master to train her sword to protect her subordinate?”

“But it is impossible for Regis to swing his sword for the sake of protecting me.”

“... That’s... Compared to Argentina getting smarter, that guy getting stronger is a much more impossible task.”

“So we should go about this in the best way. I am stronger, so I will protect Regis. Regis is smarter, so I will borrow his intellect. I think that should be fine.”

“I see, that’s why you don’t feel lost anymore.”

“Yes!”

Altina nodded firmly.

Eddie looked up into the sky.

Several clouds covered the clear blue sky.

“Regis is... unfathomable. Just reading more books will make a person that amazing? I don’t really understand military strategies either, but I’m sure that guy is a genius strategist.”

“I asked him before, ‘why do you know everything?’”

“Oh?”

“Well, he said the usual ‘This is normal’, ‘I just happened to know’... He also said something else too.”

“What is that?”

Eddie leaned in close curiously.

“Erm... After reading a book you will gain knowledge right? If you hold on to these knowledge and read other books, you will notice even more things. That’s what he said.”

“Uh-huh?”

“There are many ways to read books—— When you read something you already knew, you may think ‘I already know this, this is nothing special’ and treat the content like water off a duck’s back. Another way would be ‘because I already know this, I can discover new things’, these two types of reading. That’s what he said.”

“Oh?”

Eddie nodded, he didn’t look as if he understood, but still seemed impressed.

Altina explained again.

“That means, the people who read a lot of books can glean more things from books compared to those who don’t read much.”

“Is that so?”

“This is the same as swordsmanship! There is no point in practising triple strike before you can even swing a sword properly, right?

“Ahh, I get it. After you can defend the opponent’s attack, you would have a wider choice of counterattack options.”

“Yup, it’s the same for consecutive leg sweep attacks. Although leg sweeps are short ranged and slow, so it didn’t mean much anyway.”

“I understand now. Reading is not just about the quantity, you can reach newer heights by accumulating more experience too!”

“Regis said you have to immerse yourself in the book, then you will see a deeper and wider world.”

“Speaking of which... the stronger I get, the more I can understand how strong grandpa is... Is that the same thing?”

“Probably.”

Recently, Altina had started reading too. She allowed Clarisse to teach her.

However, using swordsmanship to describe her progress in her studies—— She had not reached the stage to learn skills yet, it’s still too early for her to swing her sword. Right now, she was preparing herself through physical exercise and training.

“‘I already received permission, please read Regis’ book collection. Then organize your thoughts and write it down.’

That's Clarisse's instruction."

Read books and write book report. That was all. For those who had attended school before, this might not even count as studying.

Even so, Altina was still progressing one step at a time.

Eddie stood up with his 'Defendre Sept' in hand.

"Alright—— That's enough rest, let's have another match."

"Okay!"

"I won't lose this time——"

"I haven't said 'I'm tired' yet!"

Altina braced up her giant 'Grand Tonnerre Quatre'

A soldier ran up the stairs.

"Your Highness!"

"Hmm?"

"A messenger is heading towards the fort! He probably came

from the capital!”

“... What’s the matter? I will be right there.”

She was wearing light armour for training use, but there didn’t seem to be time to change her clothes. Altina lifted her huge sword.

Eddie sheathed his blade too.

“I will go with you.”

Audience Hall——

Altina sat on the chair on top of the platform.

This was the room renovated by Evard when she was away on a campaign. It was plain, but still decorated with red drapes on the wall, and the skylight was furnished too. It was large enough to accommodate 30 soldiers.

Red carpets were laid out in the center.

The staff officers of the Fourth Army stood on either side of the carpet.

Escort Officer Eric, Fort Commander Evard and the Knight Commander of the newly formed ‘Flying Sparrow Knights’, Abidal Evra were all present. There was also Battalion

Commander Eddie, and Baltasar who was here as a guest.

Eight Regimental Commanders were also here.
<TL: literally 'Commander of a thousand men'.>

The Black Knight Jerome, the former commander of the Second Army Benjamin and his brother Jestin had left to reinforce the eastern front line.

The messenger rushed to the hall and genuflected.

"Message from the Field Marshall!"

He presented an envelope.

Eric walked forth briskly to receive it, and hand it over to Altina.

There was no doubt the wax seal bore Latreille's imperial seal. There were no signs of it being tampered with.

Altina cut the seal open, and unfolded the parchment inside.

"Our army defeated the enemy's main forces and retook the Fortress City Grebauvar. But 3rd Grade Admin Officer Regis d'Auric was killed in action on the field of battle. I am incredibly saddened by his loss."

Her mind seemed to be rejecting this fact as she looked at these words. His body and personal effects had already been sent to his sister in Rouen City.

Altina stood stiffly with the parchment in her hands.

Edvard approached her when he saw this.

“Your Highness, what’s the matter?”

“.....”

“Your Highness!?”

“... Ah... Eh?”

“What does the urgent message says?”

“T-This...”

She proffered the letter.

“Pardon me, allow me to read it out loud.”

Edvard was speechless, but for soldiers who experienced countless battlefields, they already had the resolve for such a day to come.

He read the contents of the letter with a pained expression.

Rowdy voices spread in an instant.

Eric fell on his knees.

“How can that be!? How can that be possible! I don’t believe it!”

“Isn’t that murder!?”

Abidal Evra said sternly.

It was true that it was a dangerous siege against a fortified enemy. But they won the battle while the strategist died, which was a hard pill to swallow.

Several staff officer approached the messenger quickly and pressed:

“This is unacceptable! How did Sir Strategist die!?”

“I am not sure... about this...”

Abidal Evra drew his sword.

“Sir Auric is the hero that saved the nation! You think you can go back so easily after bringing such a vague report!?”

Evard grabbed Abidal Evra's shoulder.

"Hold it! This man is just a messenger who rushed all the way here!"

"We... no, the Empire was saved by Sir Auric! Such... Such an ending is unacceptable!"

"It's the same for me. I know how you feel. But killing this man won't change anything."

Someone shouted:

"Your Highness! Your Highness, what do you think about this!?"

Everyone's gaze fell onto Altina.

Instead of sitting in a daze on her seat, she stood up.

"I will ask Latreille to give me a proper explanation."

Wahh! The staff officers were heated up.

Evrard said in a loud voice:

“Please wait!”

“You want to stop me!?”

“Assuming—— that Sir Regis was really murdered, seeing that opponent would be entering a lion’s den! This is different from the situation last time!”

During the Founding Day Festival, even though Altina didn’t have much prestige, Latreille still needed to be wary about his reputation. But now, there was a high chance he would dispose of his political foe by any means with no regards for notoriety.

“... I know that. I am not the fool I used to be... But I absolutely can’t accept what is written on this flimsy piece of paper... Furthermore, this is too incredulous right? I can’t believe that Regis is dead!”

“We feel the same too.”

“Evrard, Eddie, I will leave the fort to you two. Abidal Evra, how many men can we mobilize right now?”

“Three thousand... No, it should be four thousand.”

“Then mobilize them.”

“Yes my Lady. The preparations will be done tomorrow morning——”

“I said right now. Let the infantry and supply unit catch up later. The cavalry will leave first.”

“R-Right now...!?”

Argentina raised her voice:

“The only way to show my resolve is speed! I will show him that such half hearted apologies would not earn my forgiveness! Even if Latreille acts for the sake of the nation — I will still teach this stupid brother of mine that not everything he does will be forgiven!”

“I-I understand! I will act at once!”

Abidal Evra looked at the staff officers around him.

They didn’t even deliberate at all before deciding to march for the capital—— This would be a difficult expedition. And it was very likely that they would clash with the First Army.

Ugh... The staff officers were silent.

But they took a step forward.

“We swore allegiance to the Princess, and we are also in Sir Strategist’s debts! We have already made the resolve to forfeit my life at a moment’s notice!”

“Good!”

Abidal Evra passed down the detailed instructions.

Eric kneeled before Altina.

“Your Highness, I don’t know if I can be of use, but please bring me along!”

“... You might die there you know?”

“I would be happy to!”

“... Even so, please don’t die on me, can you promise that?”

“Eh? Y-Yes, I swear.”

“Good, then come along.”

“My utmost gratitude!”

The Fourth Army moved swiftly and less than an hour after the urgent order was given, 500 cavalry had already left the fort.

Before the break of dawn, four thousand infantry and the supply unit also set off.

Not one soldier hesitated in taking part.

Chapter 1 - The Contract with the Mercenaries

When Latreille ordered the assassination, and the tent was set on fire——

A place one hill away. It was almost dawn, but the hills were still dark.

Regis walked inside the forest.

And of course, his feet and head were attached to his torso just fine.

“Hah... Hah... How tiring...”

“So fast! We haven’t walked 30 minutes yet!? And you call yourself a soldier!?”

Walking on his right was Franziska. She had a short crossbow in her hand.

Fanrine on her left glared at her. Naturally, she wasn’t a mutilated corpse, and didn’t have any wounds on her skin at all.

“How rude!? Sir Regis took part in an intense battle in the day, it’s only natural for him to be tired.”

“Hah! Isn’t it normal to fight in the day and run away at night? Like I said, aristocratic ladies are really...”

“Ara ara, I thought this was a famous mercenary corps, but running away at night is normal huh.”

“As expected, I should just kill you! Big Sis, is that fine!?”

The woman walking in front of them—— Jessica said softly without even turning back:

“... Right now, we need the help of Sir Auric. This is for the sake of saving big brother.”

Regis might be very passive about this, but he wasn’t working with them just to safeguard his own life, but for Fanrine’s sake too. He was adamant about refusing to assist them if Fanrine was harmed.

Franziska pouted.

“But this woman is really infuriating!”

“... I won’t repeat myself.”

“Ugh.”

Franziska shut her mouth after hearing Jessica’s cold reply.

Regis shrugged.

“Even if I’m here, I don’t know if you can achieve your goals.”

“... It will succeed.”

“You are really confident huh?”

“... I don’t think you want to be killed by mercenaries who failed to achieve their goals. If Sir Auric helps us, it will definitely succeed.”

“Aren’t you overestimating me?”

“... This is the best way... The stars tell me so.”

She muttered as she looked up to the sky.



Regis nodded as if he was impressed.

“I see.”

“Stars?” Fanrine tilted her head.

That might be so, but the strange thing was that they didn’t encounter any sentries.

They should be able to leave the camp just like this.

Regis looked around him.

Walking in front of them was Jessica, besides him was Franziska and Fanrine. Six men from the mercenary group guarded the outside, advancing cautiously.

Franziska said cockily:

“Big Sis is awesome right!? Everyone calls her a Magician.”

“The sentries are gone, what kind of spell is that?”

In response to Regis’ question, Jessica answered.

“... Bribery.”

“What a realistic magic.”

“... It is effective.”

“Is that so? If they took the money, then capture the escaping group, they would get double the reward. Wouldn't that work better?”

“... I sent out scouts, and I will know if anything seems wrong.”

Even though she used a stratagem, she wasn't overly confident. It might be the basics of basics, but her arrangement was careful and adequate.

As expected of the strategist of Renard Pendu.

After that—— She added.

“... Those things should buy us some time.”

“You mean the headless corpses?”

Regis sighed again.

That was the body of a guard, which got disguised as Regis. As their stature was too different, Franziska mutilated the corpse horribly. Jessica was the one who came up with this scheme.

If Regis had a choice, he would have objected...

But now, for his own sake—— and also to protect the woman by his side, he didn't oppose in the end.

If he resist too much, the mercenaries would probably kill Regis. Even a corpse could be used in negotiation. There were many examples of dead hostages being used in successful negotiations.

Fanrine said sadly:

“Even so...was it really necessary...to do such immoral things?”

Was there no other way?

Regis didn't know either.

Maybe no one will visit the tent until morning. Even if he left on his own, the mission to recapture Grebauver was already done, so there wouldn't be too much problems.

However, after Regis dissect his own situation objectively, he realized that the chance he would be assassinated was very high.

Fanrine thought so too.

Jessica was absolutely certain that 'there is no reason to let you return alive'. That was why she used the corpse as a body double.

"... If it can delay the search party from being dispatched, it will increase the chance of us escaping."

"It's quite difficult to walk with this on."

Regis borrowed the uniform from the Imperial's First Army. It was too big, about two sizes too large.

Fanrine had several dresses, and was wearing another one right now.

The body double would be exposed by investigating it a little. After all, even the gender was different.

Regis suddenly asked:

“How many scouts did you send out?”

“... Two.”

“I see.”

In that case, there was a chance they would be discovered — Regis thought.

A small group of scouts can detect large units, but they might not find a small group of sentries. If the sentry was better than the scouts, they might let the scout pass and wait for the main group instead.

During a time like this, they should let four people walk ahead of them, just within earshot.

Shortly later, Regis’ prediction turned true.

“Hey, halt!”

The person who emerged from the shadow under the woods was an Imperial soldier.

He was just a light infantry, but he had the uniform of the Imperial First Army. There were four of them.

Three of them stood in front, the one behind didn't have a sword, but a whistle. They appeared well trained.

The person in front drew his sword.

"Jackpot!"

Another one of them said.

Seems like they let the scouts pass and checkmated the group behind.

The soldier asked intimidatingly:

"From your clothes, you are mercenaries!? Who are you people!? How did you come from inside the base!? And where are you going!?"

“... I should be asking you, you are not soldiers based here right?”

Jessica answered calmly as usual. Impressive guts.

Even though the mercenaries around her and even Franziska looked tense.

And of course, Regis was nervous too.

He looked to the left, and Fanrine was smiling for some reason.

—— Eh!?

“A-Aren’t you scared?”

When she heard Regis’ whispers, she answered confidently:

“Of course not. Sir Regis is here after all.”

“Eh——”

Now she mentioned it, it was time for him to take the role of

negotiator.

Regis raised a hand.

“Erm, sorry, can you wait?”

The soldier with the sword looked towards the suspicious character.

“Hah, so you are a regular soldier. Where are you going with your strange companions at such a time? State your unit.”

“Well...I am from the Imperial Fourth Army. I’m seconded to the Imperial First Army right now...”

The soldier’s expression twisted menacingly.

“Don’t spout nonsense! Why would we borrow troops from our political adversary, the Fourth Princess!? And the Fourth Army are just a motley bunch of defeated soldiers and farmers!”

That was really mean.

“Ara, but I was asked by the Field Marshall.”

“Field Marshall...? Eh, the Field Marshall!? How insolent!”

The other party got even more agitated. What a pain——
Regis scratched his head.

Fanrine stepped forward.

“Insolent you say... Which unit are you from?”

“What, a woman!?”

“I am General Affairs Officer Fanrine Veronica de Tirasolaverde. The Ministry of Military Affairs sent me.”

“What!?”

The blood drained from the soldier’s face.

As the command system for the Ministry of Military Affairs and the Military were separate, it wasn’t right to say that the General Affairs Officer ranked higher.

But the Ministry of Military Affairs was in charge of promotions and bonuses, soldiers wouldn’t want to leave a bad impression on them.

Urged by her, Regis took out a parchment from the bag on his shoulder.

It was Latreille's written orders.

"I don't really want to show this to others but..."

His heart felt heavy when he thought about this.

Letter of Appointment

Chevalier Regis d'Auric

*In acknowledgement of your numerous
valiant actions, you are hereby appointed
to the rank of First Grade Admin Officer.*

Imperial Year 851 July 15th

*First Army Commander
Allen Deux Latreille de Belgaria*

The soldiers stared wide eyed at the parchment.

“Eh...Auric... I-Impossible...That, famous... The one who guided this war to victory, the unmatched...Strategist...”

“I am just an assistant Strategist though.”

“T-Then you really are...”

“Yes, but I only have this on me though.”

Regis shrugged.

Fanrine narrowed her eyes.

“Are you telling me you don’t believe him? How obnoxious. If you bring us back to the basecamp because of your ignorance, and his identity is proven to be true, how are you going to take responsibility for this? A mere soldier disrupting the movement of a staff officer, you think you can get away from this scot free?”

“Ugh...”

“It’s another matter if we didn’t have any Identification

Documents on us, but you have already seen the appointment letter signed by the Field Marshall and you are still doubting us? I should be the one questioning your allegiance.”

“No, we are light troopers from the 36th infantry...”

The soldiers started to panic.

Jessica asked once again:

“... What are you all doing in a place like this?”

In this era, men in the Belgarian Empire had higher status than women, so the sight of a woman speaking in a lofty tone was rare.

The soldiers looked baffled and had a displeased expression.

However, they would be punished if the man before them was really Regis.

The trooper holding the whistle at the back stuck it back onto his waist pouch and answered:

“A guy from my unit said that there would be a reward if we

capture suspicious characters passing through here.”

“... How much is he paying?”

“Well, if I caught them, he will write off my gambling debts.”

They were betrayed.

Jessica frowned instantly.

And muttered.

“... To sell us out for just this much...How foolish.”

No matter what, they made it through. Regis said to them:

“Sorry, but we have to carry out a special mission. Please keep your encounter with us here a secret.”

“Y-Yes.”

They answered with a salute.

Regis returned the salute.

“Well then...Please maintain your vigilance.”

“Understood!”

The soldiers turned to leave.

Phew, Regis exhaled in relief.

Fanrine patted her chest too.

Jessica pointed at the soldiers wordlessly.

——What?

Franziska braced her short crossbow silently too.

Regis yelled out without thinking:

“You all——!?”

Chink, with soft metallic thud, a short metallic bolt flew out from Franziska hands. It pierced the throat of a soldier from

behind.

They are sealing their throats!?

The other mercenaries dashed forth at almost the same instant.

“!?”

“What, you——!?”

The soldiers tried to draw their blades, but every mercenary in Renard Pendu were elites. And the six of them were the cream of the crop, taking advantage of the element of surprise.

Even the soldiers of the Imperial First Army couldn't last a single round.

The one soldier who managed to block the first blow was also killed before he even got the chance to scream.

“I already...believed...you...”

He fell after spewing blood.

Jessica looked down at him with cold eyes.

“... How foolish to weigh your doubts and trust on the same scale. Trust is water, doubt is mud...Just a bit of mud would be enough to turn clear water muddy.”

The sight of the soldiers’ dead bodies made Fanrine lash out.

“W-Why!? Why do you have to kill them!? This is too much...”

“... Keep your voice down. It will be troublesome if the other sentries notice us. Or do you want the number of bodies to increase?”

“No...”

Fanrine said timidly.

But Jessica had already moved ahead.

Urged on by the mercenaries, Regis also strode forth. This wasn’t a place for them to linger in the first place.

If they let the soldiers leave like this—— What would they do after returning to their unit?

Would they obey Regis' instruction and keep their encounter a secret? Regrettably, such a possibility was very low.

News would probably reach Latreille in no time.

The body double trick would then become meaningless, and they would know the direction of their flight. They might even seal off the mountain paths leading towards the capital.

— Sealing their throat wasn't meaningless. But...

Regis sighed.

"Even so, there are ways that doesn't involve killing them..."

Jessica narrowed her eyes and stared at him.

"... As expected of your style."

"What do you mean?"

"... I heard Sir Auric's personality isn't like a soldier at all... 'He wants to even spare the enemy'. Isn't that hypocritical? Since you support the Fourth Princess, this will turn into a civil war one day."

“But I want to avoid unnecessary death as much as possible.”

“... You...think that the killings earlier was unnecessary?”

“Maybe.”

“... Even though the people you kill always numbered in the thousands, but you think that the handful of men before you...If the situation might endanger your life, there wouldn't be any reason to let them go. That's hypocrisy.”

“Of course I know that it is inevitable when the situation calls for killing others in order to survive. But 'not willing to kill even at the peril of one's life'—— are things only those who didn't need to kill and in a position of safety would say.”

“... Seems like you believe those soldiers would keep your tracks a secret? How laughable. You actually survived this long with such pedantry.”

“No, I think they will report it.”

“Then...”

“It's fine if they report. That will be a good feint. Prince Latreille would definitely think I escaped and pursue us. Since

his actions would be known, we can make use of that.”

“... I think the best strategy is to not let them know we escaped.”

“Is that so? Can you guarantee that the body double disguise won’t be seen through?”

“... Then we should act with the assumption that it had been seen true.”

“You have a cautious personality, so that’s what you would do. In that case, we won’t need to change our course of action even if those sentries reported back right?”

“... If it wasn’t seen through, then killing them would improve our safety. It’s better to be safe.”

“Really? Instead of killing them to increase our chance of survival, isn’t this just to give yourself peace of mind? I can’t agree with killing others to make yourself feel less uneasy.”

“ ... ”

It was rare seeing Jessica not answering.

As she was walking ahead, her expression could not be seen.

“... For us, there is no reason to let the Belgian soldiers leave alive. We will kill any enemy we feel is a threat. Including you.”

“You are mercenaries, but you are not in anyone’s employ right now, correct?”

“... Yes...Because of that...Everyone other than us are enemies. To make us an ally, there needs to be a contract.”

“I see. Well then, let’s sign a contract.”

“... The joke's not funny. Don’t kid with me.”

Jessica’s voice turned stern.

The faces of the mercenaries around them grew sinister.

Franziska pointed her short crossbow his way.

“Remember this well if you are a strategist. We mercenaries risk our lives to work! If you make a joke about signing contracts, I will be angry enough to kill you!”

Regis scratched his head.

“Not at all. Does it look like I am not putting my life on the line? There is a crossbow pointed at me right now. I don’t like to lie and I’m bad at telling jokes. I am serious about employing you all. After all, there is no one more reliable than you here.”

Jessica went back on topic.

“... You are our prisoner. Just a negotiation chip, not a negotiation subject.”

“You want to negotiate by using me to trade for the mercenary king—— correct?”

“Yes...Just from your merits in this battle, this is definitely possible. Thank you for accomplishing such a feat. The aid I rendered is very meaningful right?”

Her lips turned up in a smile.

“Ahh, speaking of which, the sudden withdrawal of the mercenaries played a large role in shaking up the battle.”

“... If your fame is good enough, it would increase your value as a negotiation chip.”

“You want to sell me a favour—— That’s what you mean? If the battle continued, it would be difficult to withdraw—— that’s your judgement right?”

“... In a serious fight, the numerically inferior Imperial forces would have a hard time right?”

“I already have a plan for this.”

And she must have known about that plan. After all, they got access to Regis’ study room by disguising as maids. They wouldn’t just be simply changing the sheets.

Jessica didn’t reveal her true intention.

Although the basics of negotiation includes letting the other party believe you weren’t lying, completely hiding your true intention wasn’t a mistake.

Jessica was planning to reorganize the mercenary group. But Regis couldn’t see through her true intentions—— It was probably why she needed to put up such an act.

However, Regis didn’t back down. Even if the mercenary had a blade to his neck, he can’t submit so meekly.

“The price for losing your credibility at Grebauver isn’t cheap.”

“... Is that so? What has that got to do with you?”

“Of course it does. I am negotiating with you after all—— that battle is watched by many countries. With the battle on the line, the Renard Pendu mercenary corps withdrew from the battle. What a cruel betrayal. The neighbouring nations saw this scene clearly.”

“... So?”

“What are your plans after getting back the mercenary king by using me in a hostage exchange?”

“... Elder brother will figure out what follows.”

“Do you think any country will hire a mercenary corps that committed such a devastating betrayal?”

“... You underestimate the capability of the Renard Pendu mercenary corps. If Elder brother returns, we will——”

“During the attack on Fort Volks, you retreated in just one night. Despite being equipped with the latest model of rifles in west Lafressange, you still lost the supply unit. And in

Grebauver, you all deserted when the battle was still at an impasse. With such a nefarious fame, you think you can haggle for a good price?”

He laid out his negotiation chips.

Jessica glared at him angrily.

“... Isn’t that all your doing?”

“Well, I don’t deny that.”

They could win all their battle except the ones against Regis — Even if they insist on this point, it would not repair their lost reputation.

They entered the dense forest.

“How about it? For me, I wish to return to Fort Volks safely, and would like the means of travel and protection. Since you are sure that the mercenary king will return, you will need new employers. You will want the chance to regain your lost reputation correct?”

“ ... ”

Jessica didn't reply.

Regis followed her as he waited for her reply.

She didn't answer immediately in the end.

The group walked in the forest that was becoming brighter gradually.

At this moment, Franziska who were silent all this while raised a hand.

"It's everyone!"

The other mercenaries also looked relieved.

They seemed to have linked up with the main body of Renard Pendu. Regis was surprised that they got so close to the Imperial base camp.

Their vision was blocked by the trees, so it was hard to make out their numbers, but from the intel he gathered before the battle, they should be 700 strong.

They were small in numbers. But this group was reputed to be the strongest mercenary group in the continent. During

the fight with the Imperial First Army, they were also positioned at the center of the enemy forces, strong like a unit's backbone.

——Since fighting Prince Latreille was now a fact, he would want to obtain this fighting force that could stand up against the First Army.

But he would want to pay as little as possible.

After all, the Fourth Army's budget was really tight.

Regis calculated in his head.

Suddenly, someone tugged the sleeve of his uniform.

"Hmm?"

"E-Erm...will it be fine?"

Fanrine appeared more nervous than the time when they encountered the Imperial patrol.

Regis smiled wryly.

“Yes, don’t worry. Instead of negotiating with corpses, we are more valuable alive.”

“I...see.”

She exhaled in relief.

—— They won’t be killed. If the hostage exchange for the mercenary king doesn’t fail...But...

Regis didn’t voice his doubt in order to sooth Fanrine’s worries——

Imperial year 851 August 10th——

It had been 15 days since they escaped from the First Army’s base camp.

Regis’ group walked inside the forest, and in order to evade the persistent searches by the First Army, they made a huge detour in the hills. After spending several a lot more time than it should be, they finally made it back.

The weather was nice and clear.

They could see the capital from the top of the hill

“Hah...We are finally here...I can't move anymore.”

“Sir Regis, just a bit more, please work a little harder.”

“Yes, right...Are you okay?”

“I am tired, but I want to wipe my body with water. And change my clothes.”

Fanrine looked down at her body. It was impossible to wear her dress and hike in the hills, so she was wearing pants made from linen.

“It would be great if I can wear normal clothes too.”

“Ara, I think this attire suits you though.”

“It's a little too heavy.”

Regis wasn't wearing the uniform of the First Army, but the clothes of a mercenary. He won't be able to move even if he wore light armour, so he only wore leather chest armour and a short sword on his waist.

After hearing the conversation between the two—— Jessica

proposed:

“... Well then...do you want to wear clothes that are lighter?”

“Oh, you prepared civilian clothes for me?”

“Hmmm...You will be dead if the Imperial Army finds you, so I already made the necessary arrangements.”

Her lips twisted for a moment, revealing a devious smile.

Regis' face tensed for a moment.

Versailles, the capital of Belgaria, was a huge commercial city.

As cargo and mercenaries frequent this place, Regis and the mercenaries from Renard Pendu got in easily.

But 700 mercenaries would be too prominent, so most of them camped out in the wild.

The group walked along the streets of Versailles.

On Regis' left was Fanrine, on his right was Jessica. Further to

the side was Franziska. Right now, she was concealing her weapon under her robes.

They were groups of three mercenaries in front and behind them, but they were at a distance where normal conversations couldn't be heard. From the perspective of others, they wouldn't think the mercenaries have anything to do with Regis' group. After all, people would wonder if they were big shots if guards followed them too closely.

If Latreille knew Regis was still alive, he might send assassins. He couldn't afford to be discovered.

It was dangerous in the capital too.

But, was this really necessary, Regis thought.

"I know this is important...But..."

He looked down at his clothes and sighed——

Two hours ago——

Jessica shook her head.

"... Sir Auric wants to return to the capital too? Sorry, but I

have to refuse. There is no reason to bring you along. Although we do need to resupply at the capital before heading to Fort Volks.”

“I explained this before—— what happens after getting the Mercenary King back is important too right? You didn’t give me an answer back then, but you already arrived at the conclusion yourself right?”

“...”

Jessica looked his way with an intimidating gaze.

Regis withstood it directly. He might back away in the past, but he seemed to be braver now. It wasn’t clear if that was a good thing though.

The mercenary corps made camp on a hill overlooking the capital.

That might be so, but they didn’t prepare any tents, with just a temporary stove and clearing stones from the ground for a place to lie down. Regis and Jessica conversed under the shade of a tree some distance away.

They seemed to be mindful of Fanrine and Franziska.

“As for me...I know Prince Latreille is after my life. Leaving your methods aside...It is undeniable truth that I got help from you. I am grateful for that, and won't plan anything nefarious against you.”

“... You want me to trust you?”

“Yes.”

“... Are you kidding? Who will believe something a prisoner says?”

Regis smiled wryly.

“There are countless examples of this in stories. I wouldn't finish even if I start recounting the tales before we reach Fort Volks. But we have to visit the capital before that of course.”

Jessica frowned.

“Such made-up stories...”

“Isn't that the same with you?”

“... What are you trying to say?”

“To make the mercenaries believe in your strategy, you brand the results of your deductions as ‘the guidance of the stars’. When things aren’t going well, you will cover it up by saying ‘I already know, but I wasn’t permitted to say’.”

“... Sorry about that.”

“No, I actually wanted to say this more gently.”

There shouldn’t be anyone in the vicinity who heard this conversation.

Jessica lowered her head.

“... No matter what others says, the mercenaries will believe me. I am not certain about what you said though. Especially after they witnessed that battle...Maybe some of them will doubt my actions.”

“I think you are evaluating me too highly. But if you do think this way, that will be good for me too.”

“... I know this is a ridiculous lie. Even so, I still need the title of Magician. In order for the mercenaries abandoned by the church to believe they will prevail on the battlefield, they have to have faith that someone amazing is supporting them from behind.”

“I understand.”

Jessica glared at him.

“... As expected...I should have killed you in the beginning.”

“H-How scary. ‘Renard Pendu’ can only fight at it’s full potential under your command and the mercenary king’s martial prowess right? I won’t do anything foolish like incorporating you into our command structure and weakening the mercenary corps. Please don’t worry.”

“... You look harmless, but your tactics are merciless, Sir Auric...You might be talking about negotiation, but what you are doing is intimidation right? To think a prisoner is threatening me.”

“No no, this is a negotiation. You have the right to make the choice. I am just offering good conditions that you have nothing to worry about.”

“... That is to follow the Imperial Fourth Army? You can’t offer good remuneration anyway.

Regis scratched his head.

“You saw through that huh.”

“... Of course. I had gathered at least this much intel.”

“Can I talk about something else then? Something you probably don’t know.”

Regis smiled

Jessica showed a displeased expression.

“... State your piece then.”

“If ‘Renard Pendu’ helps Princess Argentina, she will grant you territory and recognize your nation with her authority as Empress when she rule over the Belgarian Empire. Not a colony or a subordinate country, but a nation of equal standing.”

“... Are...Are you lying to me? Even Sir Auric who is trusted by the Princess won’t be given such authority. Are you trying to manipulate me with empty promises?”

“No no, this is what Her Highness said to the mercenary king. I headed to the capital before the negotiations are done, but he seemed really interested about this. If you think I am lying, then you can just ask him yourself.”

She opened her eyes wide.

Unbelievable, but what if it is true—— That sort of expression.

“..... The princess told elder brother...she will recognize our country...”

“Looks the same.”

“Huh?”

“When we were talking about this, the mercenary king showed the same expression.”

For some reason, Jessica blushed. Probably from embarrassment.

She then lowered her head in deep thought.

“... Such a thing...Is too incredible for a reward. We are mercenaries after all, and won't get our own nation no matter how much merit we achieve on the battlefield. If the Empire recognize us...That would be too unrealistic. Going by Imperial custom, when Prince Latreille takes the throne, Argentina will lose her succession rights. Even if she manages to take down the Emperor by force, she would just be branded a false Empress.”

“Yes.”

“... And Prince Latreille will be coronated in three days.”

According to scouts reports, they found out that the capital was preparing for the ceremony.

Even the citizens knew about this. A huge sign was erected in the plaza, and was reported on the weekly newspaper.

Regis crossed his arms.

“Yes...This might turn into a clash of arms, I want to avoid that as much as possible. I don't plan to seize control over the Empire at all cost though.”

“... You want Prince Latreille to forfeit the throne?”

“That would be the most ideal outcome.”

“... Impossible. His nature is that of a conqueror. His body and soul would be consumed by the flames of war, the stars...No, such a way of speaking.. Isn't necessary for you.”

“I rather enjoy such a performance though.”

Jessica averted her gaze.

“... Sorry...I can't act if the other party knows, it's too embarrassing.”

She looked as if she was throwing a tantrum.

Her profile looked really similar to the pouting face of her sister Franziska. It makes one think, they really are sisters.

Regis resisted the urge to smile wryly.

“From the actions of Prince Latreille so far, not only is he fixated on the throne, he is also a believer in hegemonism — Isn't that so?”

“...Yes.”

“I feel the same too.”

He nodded firmly.

Jessica sighed.

“... This act of yours...I really hate it.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

Was Jessica getting back at him for using the term ‘performance’? Regis felt a little conflicted.

“... Sir Auric, you always place the important things at the back. I don’t think I am that dumb. You will state the gist of your deduction, and will slowly guide the other party to realize it, such a way of talking...Can you not do that when you talk to me?”

“That’s troubling...I don’t mean to do that...”

Jessica looked to the side with a hmmp.

He seemed to have annoyed her deeply.

However, she had a rational character, and seemed to acknowledge that this was an important topic.

“... I haven’t investigated this part yet...But from Sir Auric’s confidence, Prince Latreille must have some ‘flaw’. If you aim for this, it would be effective enough to make him forfeit the throne?”

“I hope so. Although it is very difficult.”

“... If Prince Latreille is coronated, it would be meaningless for him to abdicate immediately. After all, Princess Argentina would lose her succession right by then.”

“Yes.”

“... You want to stop his coronation?”

“No—— ahh, speaking of which, it is a bad habit to talk about the important parts at the very back. I will explain properly. I can't go into the details before you enter a contract with us, but it is as you deduced, Prince Latreille has some shady dealings. However, I don't have any evidence right now. So I have to go to the capital. Furthermore, if he really committed this crime, even if he takes the throne, it will still be invalidated. This is an important point.”

Jessica narrowed her eyes.

“... Such a devastating ‘flaw’... could it be...is it true?”

What an intelligent woman. She deduced this much just from their earlier conversation. Her lips were trembling a little.

In the face of such a serious crime, even the mercenary from

a foreign nation was shocked.

Regis nodded without a word.

Jessica looked up to the sky. This was probably a habit of hers when she was thinking. As if she was searching for the stars that were impossible to see in daylight.

“... If that is true...then it might be possible.”

“How about it? Will the mercenary corps ‘Renard Pendu’ sign a contract with the Fourth Army?”

Looking away from the sky, she stared at Regis.

“... I refuse.”

“Oh, I see...”

There was a winning chance. But they would definitely need to clash with the new Emperor. Hence, they need to gauge the rewards in success and the losses in failure. Or rather, this was only natural.

Regis sighed with his palm on his forehead.

If he couldn't go to the capital now, he would need to rethink his strategy.

And the backup strategies would be limited in effectiveness.

"How troubling. What should I do. Leaving the contract with the mercenary corps aside, can you allow me to enter the capital?"

"... Sir Auric, do you really understand? You are already dead...Maybe assassins are looking for you everywhere right now? You will have nowhere to run if you are found in the capital."

"I know. After all, I can't even ride a horse. But I can't avoid this despite the danger. Because I already made a promise with her."

"... Promise?"

"Together with the Princess—— we will change the Empire."

Just putting out the sparks falling onto his own body wouldn't be enough. Or rather, if he don't throw himself to the scene of the fire, he wouldn't be able to overturn the current situation.

Jessica stared at Regis' face.

"... Is that so...Can I ask one thing?"

"What?"

"... Why would go so far for Princess Argentina?"

"Because she will make my ideal come true——"

"Sounds like Sir Auric values your ideals more than your own desires."

"Yes."

Although Prince Latreille want to recruit Regis to be his Strategist, Regis refused without hesitation as he was against hegemonism.

Not only did he lose the unprecedented chance for a civilian to be promoted, his own life was in peril.

".... For the sake of your ideals—— You are using of Princess Argentina to make pacifism a reality?"

“I am not really using her. I am striving alongside her. Well, I won’t refute you for now. And then?”

“... If someone who is more capable of realizing your ideals appears, what would you do? For example, if Prince Latreille wants to achieve pacifism? Will you abandon the Princess and follow a new master?”

“Then the three of us will work on it together.”

“... And if the condition is for you to work under him?”

“I see, I never thought about this before. It is a little fantastical...Well, I don’t dislike thinking—— if I could realize Her Highness’ ideals by staying in the capital, I won’t have any qualms about that.”

“... Is that how you truly feel? Giving up your own lifestyle for the sake of your ideal?”

“This has always been something I am willing to bet my life on.”

However, when Regis imagined the scene of leaving Altina to serve the emperor at the capital, he felt an unexpected feeling of sadness.

—— Why is that?

This was a familiar feeling, Regis felt like this when his sister left after getting married.

But the feeling was much heavier this time...

He never felt like this before.

It wasn't so heavy when he left the Fourth Army and headed to the capital alone.

Regis shrugged.

"Maybe...I would feel a bit lonely. I don't really understand, but I would feel a sensation of loss...I am not certain."

"... Even so, do you think it's fine?"

"It will alright if I can get closer to my ideals. I will be fine if I have my books, that's how I am after all."

Hahaha, Regis laughed.

That wasn't a lie. But that wasn't everything either.

It was a question he found it hard to answer. It was natural, since the matter of Regis' feelings couldn't be found in any books.

Jessica lowered her gaze.

"... Even though you seem to know everything like some kind of god, there is an innocent child-like side to you too."

"C-Child?"

"... It is rare to see someone uninterested in their own well being like you. Most people will prioritizing their own position when they think about things ."

"I am just a dull normal human without any good points. Instead of considering my own circumstances, reading books would be more interesting."

"... What a weirdo."

"Ughh."

What a direct comment.

“... I did reject the contract—— that’s because this is a matter between the mercenary corps and the Fourth Army. I can’t decide the fate of Renard Pendu alone.”

“I see. Then, is there any other way?”

“... Yes...If it is just me, then I can accept this.”

“Really!?”

“... Like you said, the path after we get Elder brother back would be arduous...It’s not a bad idea to put the Empire in our debt.”

“I see. So you will make an agreement with me on the personal level, and when the mercenary corps is reorganized, this would be a back up support. After getting the leader back, if the group falls into a pinch because of a lack of funds, and the Imperial Army sends you money and weapons...It would be like Magic.”

“... It will boost the morale of the members too. This is the most important part.”

“Indeed.”

The corner of Jessica’s lips rose. Like the devil described in

the bible.

“... You think I’m a bad woman right?”

“I told you before, I like your performance. In the first place, if you are acting for your selfish desire, becoming a consort of a landlord somewhere could be done easily. But you didn’t do that for the sake of your siblings right?”

She was surprised.

“W-What...are you saying? I’m a mercenary. How could I marry a nobleman...”

“To be tied by marriage to the mercenary king that is the strongest in the continent would be a wonderful pact for a regional landlord. Or rather, there should have been one or two proposals already right? Since you are beautiful.”

He unwittingly commented on the appearance of a lady.

Jessica glared at him with sharp eyes.

“... I am a mercenary, my fighting service is for sale, but not my body.”

“T-T-That’s not what I mean!? Really!”

Regis was completely flustered.

I thought I have improved recently and won’t panic over trivial things. Guess I am mistaken.

She took a step back away from him.

“... All men are the same.”

“No no...Well, beauties seem to have more troubles. But don’t worry, I am not interested in that at all.”

“I heard such excuses plenty of times before.”

“No matter what era it is, soldiers will always drink, gamble and talk about women when they are free. Not just in stories, many people are like this in real life. But if I have the money and time to spare, I will buy books. I just want to read books.”

“... Are you telling the truth?”

“It’s true! It’s just that everyone doesn’t know the joy of reading. I think reading is more interesting than any other game.”

Jessica smiled wryly. It was rare seeing her laugh.

“Fu, fufu...As expected, you are a weirdo.”

“Well, many people tell me that...”

“I like reading books too.”

“Really? You too!? What did you read recently? Ah, you mentioned books, but there are tactics and management books too right?”

“I read anything. Books are hard to come by in the first place. The last book I read is ‘Crescent Knight’. Do you know about this?”

“Ohh, isn’t that a book by Baron Visuveul!?”

“I think that’s him. A female knight plays a large role in this story, which is uncommon.”

“Yes, it’s a nice tale. The scene where she fought a duel with her elder brother’s sworn enemy is amazing. Well, just like in his previous books, the baron ——”

“Ah, you can’t!”

“Hmm?”

“... E-Erm...I didn’t finish the book.”

“Ahh, sorry!”

“Really now...this is your fault in the first place.”

Compared to the earlier tense atmosphere, her tone had relaxed a lot.

Maybe Jessica had always been acting the part of an unapproachable beauty, and she would only revert to her true self when she talks about books.

“My fault?”

“That’s right. That night, I was reading in my tent happily when someone created a fog and attacked...In the end, not only did I have to abandon most of my luggage and escape, I had to leave the book I read halfway in the tent. Was it burned, discarded or sold...No matter what, it won’t be coming back.”

Regis remembered—— That was the ‘battle of west Lafressange’.

In order to defeat the High Britannia supply unit that was escorted by her mercenary corps, Regis used the tactic of creating fog. Because the long ranged rifles and powerful cannons would be rendered useless when shrouded by the fog.

The tactic was a success, and the Imperial Fourth Army defeated the supply unit successfully.

It seemed that Jessica was reading ‘Crescent Knight’ intriguingly during that time.

Regis slumped his shoulders.

“Ughhh...Is that so...I am very sorry.”

Tears was about to flow from the corner of his eyes.

Jessica started to panic.

“Eh!? Y-You don’t need to cry over it right!? Well, it is a war after all...I only mentioned it because I felt it was a bit of a pity.”

“If I was in your shoes, I would definitely cry. Not only was your reading time interrupted, you can’t read it anymore! That’s too cruel! It is just like hell.”

“Not to that extent...Well, forget it, I will buy a new one if I have time and read it again. Can I count on you to foot the bill as my remuneration?”

Regis rubbed his eyes.

“Yes, of course—— Well then, I will be counting on your help on the personal level.”

“... Right. Before Elder brother returns, I will help you. The remuneration would be supplying us with enough fund and equipment to complete our next job. Is this much alright with you?”

“I can guarantee that you will be treated in the same manner as the soldiers of the Imperial Fourth Army.”

“Just like regular troops? I like a generous employer.”

Jessica reached out her right hand.

Regis extended his right hand too, and the two of them clasped their hands.

“I also made a very reliable comrade.”

Chapter 2 - Lady Regis

In response to Regis complaints about his leather armour and sword being too heavy, Jessica suggested:

“... Well then... do you want to wear clothes that are lighter?”

“Oh, you prepared civilian clothes for me?”

“Hmmm... You will be dead if the Imperial Army found you, so I already made the necessary arrangements.”

Jessica’s lips twisted for a moment, revealing a devious smile.

The clothes she retrieved from her luggage was definitely lighter than leather armour

It was civilian clothings.

And it was top notch in quality—— even if one walked in the streets of the capital Versailles, you wouldn’t look out of place. At the same time, it wasn’t ridiculously conspicuous. Most important of all, it would be impossible for soldiers to suspect Regis if he put it on. It was very safe.

Regis couldn't conceal his expression of unwillingness.

"This is... perfect in a sense... but it has a big flaw."

"Ara, what could that be? I think the size fits you well."

Jessica was replying calmly as usual, but she was obviously holding back her laughter.

Regis pointed to the clothes she prepared.

"Isn't that a woman's dress!?"

Ahhahahaha! Franziska who heard the entire conversation laughed loudly without restraint.

Jessica seemed to be on the verge of laughing too.

With a trembling voice, she said in a straight tone:

"Pfft... But, you don't need to worry about being discovered by the soldiers in the capital now right? Gugu..."

"But I'm a man."

"They definitely won't think that you would cross dress."

"Don't kid with me."

“... Ara, Sir Auric? Your ideals and dignity, which one is more important?”

“Ugh!? W-What does that have to do with this!?”

“If not, then what is the issue?”

Regis crossed his arms and think.

“No, it’s just that... Well... Only drunkards who got carried away or comedy characters would cross dress...”

“That’s exactly the reason. Please don’t worry. Your looks aren’t too bad, it will be hard to recognize you if you put on some make up. Your limbs are slender too.”

“It’s hard to be happy about your evaluation.”

“You said you are willing to bet your life on your ideals right?”

“U-Ughhh... Hah... I get it.”

Regis raised the white flag.

In a flash, someone appeared before him suddenly. It was Fanrine who was listening quietly at the side from the beginning.

He could feel her eyes sparkling.

“Sir Regis! Leave the make up to me!”

“Eh? Don’t you feel disappointed about a man crossdressing...?”

“Not at all! Since the beginning, I have always felt that Sir Regis would look great in a dress!”

“So you thought that way since the very beginning...”

“Make up for ladies is a mandatory course for nobles. I had been learning from professionals since I was young. I will definitely give you a makeover that will make 100% of the men turn to look twice!”

“Don’t do that, it’s fine if they don’t turn back right!?”

They seemed to be ignoring Regis’ complaints.

Franziska laid out her tools.

“Well, crossdressing is also a way of disguising right? I’ve also infiltrated the Imperial Army by disguising as a maid too.”

“Yes, that’s amazing. I didn’t notice at all.”

“Right——? Hmmp hmmp!”

“Although your Belgarian had a strong Germanian accent, but the constant invasion and recapture of territories meant that races and languages becoming mixed would be natural. Island nations like High Britannia are exceptions though.”

Even more so for servants. For maids there were more foreigners compared to pure Belgarians. After all, few people would mind the accent of a maid.

Franziska showed a complicated expression.

“I-Is my Germanian accent that thick? Isn’t it normal?”

Jessica didn’t answer and just nodded.

“Please get ready quickly. We are not here to sightsee.”

“Okay, I will start right now!”

Fanrine was full of drive.

Franziska gestured eagerly from the side.

Even Jessica joined in, and so—— Regis became a toy for the women.

Regis' group walked on the streets of the capital.

The city was already in a festive mode.

Because Prince Latreille's coronation was at hand.

And the war victory over their neighbour made the festival even grander.

Not only did they recapture Grebauvar city, they caught the enemy queen, and a young, strong and intelligent Emperor would be crowned.

The citizens of the Empire were looking forward to the coronation ceremony.

Stalls adorned both sides of the street, flowers decorated the city and bards serenade the crowd. There were plenty of tourist here who traveled here just to attend the ceremony.

The city was bustling.

Regis who was walking along the street looked down at his appearance, and sighed deeply.

"I know this is necessary... But..."

"It suits you Reg—— Ah, Ms Regina. You look really cute."

Fanrine was all smiles.

The disguise would be meaningless if they used his real name, so they prepared an alias. His name was Regina. The four of them were friends in their setting.

Regina, Fanrine, Jessica and Franziska.

He knew that the disguise would keep him safe...

“But telling me it suits me makes me more depressed.”

Regis slouched his waist.

Puck! Franziska slapped his back.

“We did a great job right!? You are really cute, but not as cute as me!”

“That hurts... Well, I am thankful that I can walk in the city safely because of this disguise, but that’s about all.”

Jessica said with a plain expression.

“... As long as you don’t get addicted to this.”

“Spare me.”

It might be lighter than leather armour, but it is easy to trip on his skirt, it feels breezy below and he felt the area around his neck is too exposed. He couldn’t calm down.

Jessica asked:

“... Well then, where to?”

“I have a well connected friend. Let’s start from there.”

“... You don’t have a base here, but you still managed to lay down an intelligence network, impressive.”

“I’m not the impressive one, it’s the people I know. I will feel really bad if you got that wrong.”

“I guess... Can I stock up on my supplies now?”

They need to take 700 people to Fort Volks after all. They will pass by several cities along the way, but it would be better to prepare provisions and tents as much as possible. If the situation permits, she wanted horses and wagons too.

Renard Pendu might be elites, but only Jessica was good in negotiation.

Franziska asked with a frown.

“You really don’t need me to come along?”

“... I already have escorts. This is the enemy’s homebase, and I won’t do anything against the law.”

“Then take care of yourself Sis.”

“... Your side would be more dangerous though?”

“I know. Aur... Ah, no, I will take care not to be conned by

Regina. Well, I will not hesitate to kill him if he tries to run.”

What a shocking conversation. Is there any meaning to using alias——
Regis thought.

Jessica seemed to think so too and admonished:

“... Don’t say such stupid things, try to not expose your real identity alright?”

“O-Of course! The intelligent me won’t make such a mistake!”

Franziska puffed out her chest.

“... You are too loud.”

After saying that with a sigh, Jessica walked down the streets towards the commercial zone. The three mercenaries kept a distance from her like before and followed her.

After seeing Jessica off, Regis pointed down the street.

“Well then, let’s go to Ms Carol’s bookstore——”

“Ms Regina!”

Fanrine grabbed his hand tightly.

“Eh?”

He could see her stiff expression from the side.

Following her gaze, he saw two Imperial soldiers walking towards them.

Franziska reached into her bag. Her crossbow was in there.

Although her finger was on the trigger, she was as calm as ever. She seemed to have gotten used to this situation. Even Regis who had seen his fair share of acting felt her performance was outstanding.

With an amiable smile, Franziska responded to the approaching soldiers:

“Yes? How may I help you?”

“Ah... Not you, it’s that person...”

The soldiers were looking at Regis.

I am not suited for acting—— Regis thought from the bottom of his heart. He started to sweat, his vision wavered and even his breathing turned ragged.

“Ah... Ughh...”

Fanrine stood forth as if she was protecting him.

“My apologies gentlemen, did we offend you in anyway? Others often say that this child is weird.”

“Hmm, can we look at her face?”

“Eh, well... well... this child isn’t good at interacting with men.”

The soldiers broke into a smile.

“Ahh, really now! I thought it would be like this. It is rare seeing such innocence nowadays.”

“We are the capital’s Imperial guards. We are professional soldiers you know.”

——Hah?

Regis was a little confused.

Franziska interjected:

“T-This child isn’t good at such matters!”

“Isn’t that wonderful!? Please let me speak with her.”

The soldiers pushed Franziska aside and head up to Regis.

Fanrine wanted to protect Regis, but was pushed forcefully away too.

If there were just two enemy soldiers on the battlefield——

They could be beaten down without needing any schemes at all. But being hit on was completely unexpected. And naturally, they never thought about it

—— Why are soldiers hitting on me!?

They lean their face close.

They will realize if they observe from so close!?

It would be terribly embarrassing if they found out!

No, that's wrong. He will die if they caught him!

If he could calm down, he might be able to use all sorts of strategies he had read in the past. But Regis was in complete panic mode right now.

“Uwah...”

When they saw him act like this, the soldiers' breathing hastened.

“W-W-What's your name? Where do you come from? Your face became like this just from us talking... How pure. Just like a newly bought sword.”

“No no, I think she is like a newborn hare.”

“?”

Regis tilted his head.

—— What's going on? Are they trying to court me with their poetic words?

There were many educated soldiers in the capital, but their metaphors were all over the place. New swords, hares and whatnots.

“Erm... Poetic lines to compliment the innocence of a young lady huh... How about using a scene from ‘Laure’s Journal’? Your lips are like the brilliant sunlight that melts the snow, like the spring breeze in my heart’—— something like that.”

“Ughh!?”

The soldiers took a step backwards.

Fanrine covered her snickering with her fingers.

“Ara ara... this child will read whenever she has time. Do you like poetry? Plays are fine too.”

The soldiers scowled their face in disgust.

Their elegant attitude suddenly turned brutish.

“What the hell, she’s smart!”

“Tch... You can leave now!”

They were chased away like unwanted dogs.

Women were supposed to serve men—— such values were common in this era. Women who were smarter than men were despised.

After they moved away from the soldiers, Regis exhaled deeply.

“Uwahh~ we are safe~”

“Hufufu... I feel refreshed, Ms Regina.”

Fanrine stuck her tongue out a little and nodded:

“Yup! Those arrogant men said ‘Ughh’!? That’s hilarious! They are just weak and stupid fellows, why are they acting so high and mighty for? How infuriating.”

“That’s right. The thinking that men should have a higher status than women are already outdated values.”

It was rare to see Fanrine agreeing with Franziska.

“You think so too right, Regina!?”

“Isn’t that right, Ms Regina?”

They wanted to seek his consensus, but Regis was also a weak and stupid guy too...

“Ahhh, hmm... well maybe. Compared to the younger brother who is a soldier, the elder sister who is a maid is stronger.”

They understood in their mind, but with the way Regis was dressed, it was like three women making small talks.

Franziska pointed to the side.

“W-What is that!? Donuts? Snacks!?”

“It is donuts. A sort of pastry made by deep frying sugared dough.”

“Uwah, let’s eat that!”

“Speaking of which, it has been a long time since I ate snacks. Is that alright, Regina?”

“Huh? Well... that should be fine. We didn’t eat lunch yet... Ehhh!?”

Before he finished, Franziska grabbed his hand and charged into the donut shop.

“Awesome! Hey, which one should we get!? There seems to be three types!?”

“Just buy one of each then...?”

“I knew this might happen, so I brought money along.”

Fanrine took out gold coins out of nowhere. Franziska ordered with a big smile.

“Then one of each, total of three sets!”

——What!?

“That will be nine in total.” The counter staff answered with a smile.

Isn't that too much? Regis thought, but for girls, they could eat desserts no matter how much there was.

Speaking of which, Altina could eat a scone after her meal.

Was this to hide the fact about their disguise?

Franziska picked up a donut and bit it.

“Uwah!? Delicious!”

“Yes, it's been a long time since I last ate snacks.”

Fanrine was all smiles as she nodded.

“.....”

Regis chewed on the donut as he thought about how amazing a creature women were.

Regis' group came to Carol's bookshop. It was a large store with a green sign and white words.

Because the coronation was just around the corner, they displayed a large number of books related to previous Emperors and related ceremonies. And there were unexpectedly many books about Prince Latreille. Most of them were published recently.

Fanrine had calmed down, but Franziska were still looking around worriedly

Regis spoke to the lady at the counter reading through an accounts book.

“Ya...”

The blacked haired lady had shoulder length hair, and wore a blue apron. Her name was Carol de Talleyrand, the owner of this large bookshop.

She looked up immediately.

“Yes, how may I help you, dear customer?”

She replied with a gentle expression.



“Erm... It’s me...”

“Hmm?”

She tilted her head.

She was smiling as usual but... When Regis felt something was amiss, he realized he looked different from his usual self.

—— How should he explain this.

His disguise worked too well. Even his acquaintance didn’t recognize him!

No, this is expected. For a man who left for war and had yet to return, it would be hard to imagine him returning in the guise of a woman.

That might be so, but there were other patrons in the shop right now, so he couldn’t reveal his true identity here.

“Erm, well... Ms Carol, it’s me...”

“Eh? I am very sorry dear customer... I can’t recall...”

She looked troubled.

“As expected, it’s not working. Oh right——”

He didn’t imagine such a situation would happen, but they already tied down a simple code when exchanging intel with letters or contacts.

“Ms Carol—— Can you tell me the title of a book that was just

published? A youth in the clothing trade was found out to be the illegitimate son of the King and succeeded the throne. He then married a beautiful queen from a noble bloodline. Such a book.”

She opened her eyes wide.

“Ehhh!? C-Could it be... that queen is a woman who always acted on her whims... A story like that?”

“Yes yes, when he met the King, she said ‘how revolting’.”

“And the queen actually has a secret right?”

“C'est vrai! (That's right)”

After exchanging a few words, he finally conveyed the true identity of Ms Regina to Carol. She stared at Regis' face.

“I-It's true? To come here like this... what a surprise...”

“It is embarrassing, but it can't be helped.”

He blushed unconsciously.

Carol who was in a daze came to her senses. She then urged them to walk deeper into the bookshop.

“This way please. I will lead you to that book.”

Under the guidance of Carol, Regis' group was brought to the coffee table deep within the shop. They were seated at the very corner of the shop.

This shop used to be a cafe, so they patrons could have a coffee here after buying their book, and read their books

leisurely.

Carol gave a look, and someone brought coffee for four people over immediately.

It had been a long time.

Regis became emotional because of nostalgia.

After confirming no one was around, Carol leaned closer.

“Y-You really are... Mr Regis?”

“Please don’t misunderstand. There are many reasons why I am dressed like this. They are higher than the mountains and deeper than the oceans. Anyone will understand after hearing me out.”

“This long winded way of speaking, you really are Mr Regis.”

“Your rationale bothers me, but I am still glad that you will believe me.”

“I get to see you alive again...”

Gradually, Carol’s eyes grew moist.

Regis didn’t expect her to be so moved and was at a lost.

“Haha... Well, I survived because I got lucky.”

“This is wonderful. So, how should I address you?”

She wiped the corner of her eyes with her fingertips and said with a wry smile.

Regis scratched his eye, but it shifted his wig a little, and he pushed it back hurriedly.

“Ah, well... R-Right now... I’m... Regina.”

“I understand, Ms Regina.”

She seemed very happy.

Carol then shift her gaze towards Fanrine.

“You visited here together with Mr Regis before right? From House Tirasio Laverde.”

“Yes, I’m Fanrine Veronica de Tirasio Laverde. Previously, I am charged with surveilling Sir Regis as a General Affairs Officer from the Ministry of Military Affairs... Right now, I am a fugitive on the run alongside him.”

She answered with perfect etiquettes.

The two of them only met once a month ago, but they still remember each other.

Regis introduced the last person.

“This should be your first meeting right? This is Ms Franziska.”

Right after her introduction, she threw a sharp glare at Carol.

“Who is this woman?”

“She is someone who takes great care of me, understands me the best and helps me out a lot.”

“Hmm? Then there is no need to hide our identities?”

“Of course.”

Carol introduced herself.

“I am the owner of this bookshop, Carol de Talleyrand.”

“Oh. I am the cute Franziska from the mercenary group Renard Pendu. I’m acting as this guy’s escort and keeping watch over him on my Sis’ orders. Well, pleased to meet you.”

“Ah! That famous...!?”

Carol looked at her with surprise.

Regis nodded.

“So you know about Renard Pendu. As expected of Ms Carol.”

“Fufu... you are always full of surprises. One week after I heard you died in the battle for Grebauver, you actually came to me in this attire with a Duke’s daughter and a member of a famous mercenary band.”

“Died in battle?”

Regis leaned forth.

Carol nodded.

“Yes, that’s what I heard. This news is widely spread in the capital, and I have confirmed this with an acquaintance of mine in the military, it can’t be wrong.”

—— In that case, that meant Latreille meant to assassinate him. Or was he tricked by the fake corpses?

No, could this be a trick to make him ease his guard?

“Can you tell me the cause of death?”

“I don’t know the details... but I heard the body was sent to his next of kin.”

Was the body double sent to his sister? He felt sorry about that.

“Did the Fourth Army receive this report too?”

“Probably? It is only natural to report this to the Fourth Army.”

“Well, that’s true...”

Regis crossed his arms.

Personally, he didn’t want Altina to worry. He wanted to, but if he tried to contact the Fourth Army now——

Latreille might noticed midway.

Fanrine said:

“Ms Regina, I understand that you are worried, but don’t be rash alright?”

“Yes, I got it.”

Or rather, he was worried about Altina acting rashly.

Carol asked:

“There are other intel too, you want to hear about them, Ms Regina?”

“Yes, that’s why I’m here.”

“Looks like this will be a long talk, I will get some snacks. This snacks are all the rage recently.”

What the server placed on the table, was sugar glazed donuts.

Regis sipped on his second cup of coffee.

“Phew...”

It was delicious.

The donuts were sweet too. The sugar caramelized during the baking and it had a soft texture hidden under its crispy exterior. The taste of honey spread from the tip of his tongue.

Surrounded by books with delicious coffee and donuts——
How blissful it would be to read like this through the night.

Regrettably, Regis couldn’t spare the time to read leisurely.

“Ms Carol, do you have any information regarding that matter I requested of you?”

“Yes, right here.”

There wasn’t any customers near the table, but it was better

to be careful. Carol handed a book over to him.

Regis took it and open the pages.

There was a piece of paper like a bookmark in it.

It was an investigation report.

What Regis asked her to investigate was—— the truth behind the death of the Emperor and Consort.

“... Hmm... It’s as I expected.”

“There wasn’t any decisive evidence, but considering the situation before the passing of the Emperor... The court physician who performed the autopsy, the personal physicians of the Consort as well as the maids and servants, there are some who went missing.”

Fanrine opened her eyes wide.

“What!? H-How did you collect such intel!?”

Carol concealed her wry smile with her hand.

“I have friends in the courts who likes all sorts of gossips.”

“Even so...”

Regis kept the report into the pocket of his skirt quickly after he finished reading it. There were hidden pockets on the inside of the skirt. It should be meant for espionage activities —— not, it’s actually just a place to keep one’s handkerchief.

“As the higher ups of the Ministry of Military Affairs and the Military are controlled by Field Marshall Latreille, intel doesn’t

really leak. However, it is still possible to find out about what happened inside the courts. But of course, this is all thanks to Ms Carol's amazing social network."

"Hufufu... It is only this effective when our regular Mr Regis request for it. Ah, you are Ms Regina now."

"You have my deepest thanks. Maybe this might change the history of the Empire."

"It is something so important?"

"Yes, to be honest—— asking you to do this is a little too harsh of me."

"Some of these people are already missing, but unfortunately, I couldn't find any witness."

"There are circumstantial evidences, but they are too weak."

And the testimony of just a few maids wouldn't overturn Latreille's position.

"It will be best if we can obtain intel from the second prince's inner circle..."

"Prince Latreille's retainers won't spill a word even at the threat of death. That's how unshakable their loyalty is. I witnessed it with my own eyes."

"This is tough."

"Even so... The Prince seemed too hasty. He's preparations seemed shoddy. So it was done in the spur of the moment after all? I think too many people knew the truth. In that case, maybe the information obtained from people outside his

inner circle would be enough to jeopardize his position.”

“That’s true. What do you think about this person?”

Carol proffered a second book.

Regis turned over the pages like before, and looked at the paper clipped between them.

“—— Grand Chamberlain Beclard? That’s the Emperor’s trusted aide. He recognized Prince Latreille’s right to succeed the throne as the ‘living will of the late Emperor’.”

“He seemed to have entered the Emperor’s chambers when he passed.”

“He should know the entire truth. After all, it’s because this important figure is backing Prince Latreille, that’s why he could shake off any suspicion and ascend firmly up the stairs of coronation.”

The coronation would take place three days later.

Fanrine tilted her head.

“Marquis Beclard huh. I rarely hear any positive news about him though? I saw him at parties several times before... What if he emulate Prince Latreille’s retainers and refuse to reveal the truth?”

Franziska knocked the table lightly with her clenched fist.

“What do you mean by ‘rarely hear any positive news’!? Make it clear, you think this is the time to be reserved?”

“Hmm... Rumours say his character is found wanting... Hmm,

there's no point if I don't explain it clearly now. Well——
Marquis Beclard likes money a lot. My family runs a large business in the south, not only do we need legal documents to do so, he also asked us for a lot of money. Although he wasn't the only one with authoritative power to do so..."

"Hah! The Empire sure is corrupt."

Franziska spitted.

This was an infuriating matter indeed.

However, Regis knew that this system had been in place for a very long time. He was working so hard in order to change it.

Fanrine continued:

"My apologies for digressing—— but the negotiations are done by my sister Eleanor, so I don't know the details."

"No, I am very thankful. This can serve as a reference."

When she heard Regis said that, Fanrine squinted her eyes happily.

Franziska asked:

"Regina, what should we do? Should we compete with the Second Prince and bribe that greedy old man with money?"

"... That would be a peaceful way to resolve this.
Unfortunately, I am poor like normal citizens, and the Fourth Army is on the verge of bankruptcy because of this war.
Princess Argentina's mother is also a civilian... On the other hand, Prince Latreille is the Field Marshall and is backed by many grand nobles. Our financial prowess is way lesser than

his.”

“Really now, no matter how good your tactics are, fighting war is still dependent on money though? You really think you can win this?”

“The Fourth Army fighting prowess had increased, but we probably can’t win against the First Army. Ideally, we can win without fighting.”

“That’s not an ideal, but a delusion right?”

Regis said with a bitter smile:

“Hahaha... Well, no matter what, if we can force a testimony out of the Chamberlain, I think it would be enough to change the situation.”

Fanrine nodded.

“I think the idea is fine. The problem is how to carry it out.”

Franziska said with a cocky smile:

“Kidnap him?”

What a shocking proposal. Carol shook her head at this:

“Chamberlain Beclard understand his position very well. He hasn’t left his house recently. His mansion was surrounded by a huge number of troops like a fort, he even refuse interviews with reporters. It is impossible to abduct him.”

“Tch.”

Franziska clicked her tongue crudely, which made Fanrine

frown.

Regis asked:

“... Did you get your intel from a reporter?”

“Yes. It is someone who publish newspaper for the working class, and criticize the system. The publishing company is call Weekly Quarry.”

“Has that weekly paper always been like this?”

“Yes, since half a year ago.”

“Ahh, so the number of anti establishment papers had been increasing while I was away from the capital.”

Since it was something published with words, Regis will read newspapers too.

Weekly Quarry was comprised of reporters and a chief editor that loves sarcasm. They would occasionally criticize the establishment harshly and expose scandals of the aristocrats.

One time, a noble personally visited the Publisher to protest a published article with thinly veiled threats. However, the entire conversation was published the next day, blowing the whole incident up. In that end, that noble moved away from the capital as if he was fleeing.

Carol continued:

“The sales number of Weekly Quarry seemed to be increasing. Compared to before, the number of people talking about Liberalism is rising.”

“Instead of reporters, they are more like social activists.”

“He wants to meet Mr Regis too though? You are a hero who rose from peasantry after all.”

“No no, I’m not... No, wait...”

Regis fell into deep thought.

This might not be a bad idea.

Carol carried on:

“Maybe that reporter can introduce people with strong connection to the courts to us.”

“And that person is...?”

“Eh, do you know Morgane Bourguine?”

“Hmm? I heard this name before...”

“Three years ago, in the plaza in front of the Palace——”

“Ahh, it’s that brave lady who gave a speech about ‘This country is rotting’ right? Is she inside the palace? No, that is impossible. She should be wanted by the police right?”

“Why?” Fanrine asked.

Those who criticize the Emperor was culpable of Lèse-majesté, but political activism including critique of the governing system was allowed. This was the policy of this nation.

Franziska snorted:

“Hah! No matter what the law says, those who goes against the authority will have a hard time right?”

“They actually...”

“... Yes. It’s regrettable, but Franziska is right. It might be permissible by law, but criticizing the aristocracy in public would not end well. This isn’t like venting at night in a bar, it is a speech in the plaza before the palace after all.”

This was no different from nocking an arrow against the nobles.

Fanrine lowered her head depressedly.

“I am not a naive little girl too. During my time as a General Affairs Officer in the Military Affairs Ministry, I also saw the shady side of the Empire. But... Even so, what I have seen in these few days cannot be ignored. They actually went that far!”

“We are fighting in order to make all this right.”

Fanrine nodded in response to Regis.

Franziska shrugged. She had no intentions of ‘bettering this country’.

Carol turned back to the topic:

“I am an acquaintance of Ms Morgane. When she was still teaching, she used to frequent my shop.”

“Have I seen her before?”

“Maybe.”

Female customers were rare, so he might remember if he saw her face... But now that he thought about it, Regis didn't really pay attention to others when he visited the bookshop.

“Do Ms Morgane... know some people in the courts?”

“—— The reporter from Weekly Quarry said so. Even I don't know where she is right now, but that reporter is able to contact her.”

“I see...”

“That reporter also said that this would definitely be an attractive proposal to Mr Regis.”

“He seems to be really sharp.”

Regis couldn't refute that. Because he needed to get into contact with someone familiar with the courts.

If that reporter rendered his aid, he would have another option.

Franziska stood up.

“The sooner we act, the better right? We can't wander around the capital aimlessly for days after all!”

“That's right. Ms Carol, can you tell me that reporter's name?”

As Carol was still tied up with work, it was better to not take anything conspicuous. For Regis, she was the main pillar in this intel war. It would be problematic if she attracted Latreille's attention.

With her introduction letter in hand, Regis' group of three visited the publishing company.

It was a building that faced the main road without any signboard. It was too big for a normal residence, but Regis didn't know if it was the newspaper company Weekly Quarry.

Fanrine tilted her head.

"Is this really the place?"

"It should be. Let's go in and take a look."

Regis knocked the wooden door.

A short moment later, the door opened.

A man with large ears and tanned skin peered out. His flat leather hat was worn really low, and he gazed at Regis sharply.

He opened his dry lips.

"... I don't recall hiring maids, and refuse any solicitation. I have never miss my monthly donation to the church. In conclusion, I have no money, go somewhere else." Seeing that he was about to close the door, Regis said frantically.

"Is the reporter Mr Claude here!? I am here on someone's introduction!"

“Sigh... If you want to complain about that guy, then write a letter. If you wish to support him, just buy our next publication.”

“Please wait. If you are interested in Regis Auric, we can talk this over.”

The man stopped his movement of closing the door.

“Some news about him should be fine.”

“If you can talk with him directly?”

“I won’t pay any interview fees though.”

“Or rather, he is here to visit on someone’s introduction...”

“Who?”

“... Bookshop, if that is enough for you.”

“What, bookshop? Anything else?”

“Erm, you should understand this way... ‘Thank you for your roses from the other day’ or something... I think it’s a birthday. Not really sure though.”

Pfttt! The man almost spitted.

“Ms Carol introduced you!?”

“Yes.”

The man poked his face out of the door, then checked the surroundings.

After confirming that Regis' group of three was alone, he said:

"Come in quick!"

The house had 8 work desks.

On the tables were messy piles of books and manuscripts tied up by ropes.

In a place blocked off by a screen, two double seater couch faced each other.

Donk, the man kicked the couch.

"I told you to go home if you want to sleep!"

Ah, ahh... A man wearing torn clothes groaned as he rolled off the couch. Laying prone on the floor, he raised his head — and saw Regis.

Wah! He opened his eyes wide.

"Ughaaaah!? H-How cute! Who is she!?"

"Ehhh!?"

Regis backed away unconsciously. He felt he was in danger.

The man with the hat kicked at the butt of the man in torn clothes.

"What are you saying to our guest! Go pour us some coffee!"

"That stings——!?"

He rubbed his butt as he stumbled out of the room.

Fanrine's face was turning green. Seems like such a crude atmosphere wasn't suitable for a Duke's daughter.

Regis felt this place look like his own quarters when he gets busy, so he wasn't too surprised. Although there wouldn't be any kicking of butts.

Franziska who's a mercenary didn't have any reaction.

The man with the hat sat on the couch and pointed to the other side.

"Have a seat."

"Yes, sorry to intrude."

Regis sat down.

And Franziska sat beside him as if this was only natural.

But Fanrine stood stiffly. She would treat commoners as equals, but that wasn't the problem here. A man who had noth bathed in god knows how many days just slept in this couch. It was only natural for her to be repulsed by this mentally.

Regis didn't say anything about that. The couch wasn't big enough for the three of them anyway.

Franziska looked around the publishing company.

"So, where is that Claude guy?"

"That's me."

Seemed like what he did earlier was all an act.

Regis nodded.

“I see, so that’s it.”

Claude opened his left palm that bore a knife scar and said:

“Sorry about that. I had the experience of being stabbed the moment I gave my name.”

“That’s...”

“You mentioned that Ms Carol sent you?”

“Yes, she gave me this.”

Regis opened his handbag and retrieved the introduction letter. Handbag for women were really small. He had to fold the envelope for it to fit. It was about the size of an ammo pouch used in battlefields.

Claude took the letter and asked:

“And your name is?”

“I am Regis Auric. Although I had the honour of being Regis d’Auric some days ago...”

“Hah?”

He had a shocked expression.

That was to be expected. Regis was crossdressing after all.

He was troubled about how to explain when——

Fanrine supplemented:

“This is because Sir Auric can’t walk around the capital in his usual appearance, so he had to put on this disguise. Ah, the two of us are just tagging along, don’t mind us.”

Claude looked at the introduction letter wide eyed.

“You really are...!?”

“Ms Carol likes to jest, but she won’t lie.”

“Indeed.”

He swept his gaze through Regis several times.

“... You really are a man?”

“Yes.”

Regis felt embarrassed to be stared at so closely.

Franziska puffed out her chest.

“Isn’t our make up skills amazing!?”

Claude nodded.

“Yeah, it’s impressive. It’s done really well.”

The makeup was mainly done by Fanrine, but Regis kept quiet about that——

Moments later, the man in torn clothes came from inside the house. He was wearing a nicer jacket and had combed his

hair with wax now.

“Ahaha, for you, mademoiselle (young lady).”

He only had one cup in hand, and placed it before Regis.

Claude yelled at him:

“Why is there only one!? Enough, scram aside!”

“Sigh, how can you be so harsh to the chief editor!?”

“Chief Editor!?”

Regis blurted out without thinking. This position should be higher than reporters, and the leader on the ground...

Hah ah ah~ Claude sighed.

If you know you are a supervisor, then go edit the report I just finished. Go on and do your work.”

“Really now, why are you always ordering your boss around, Claude. While you yourself are talking to cute girls.”

“This is a man!”

“No way!? Isn’t that even better!?”

“I will send you flying with a kick!”

The man who was addressed as the chief editor walked to the largest desk as he complained. Seems like he really is the chief editor.

Claude slouched his shoulders.

“He might be a weirdo, but his writing is really sharp.”

“Speaking of which, your sales had been on the rise?”

“That’s after that guy took over as chief editor half a year ago.”

“Ahh... That’s why...”

That man looked like a homeless bum who was reading a newspaper he happened to pick up. You really couldn’t judge a book by its cover.

Franziska took the coffee placed before Regis and drank it.

“Ah, this person is Regina now. It would be terrible if you call him by his real name in public alright?”

Claude nodded.

“According to rumours, you already died in battle.”

“Ehh? From that perspective, you don’t seem surprised? And you believed me immediately...?”

“The body didn’t have a head—— I heard about this, so I thought that you are definitely still alive. After all, Regis d’Auric is a genius strategist. He would definitely be prepared for that. Since it was a headless corpse, that might be a body double.”

“I’m not a genius. I just happen to be lucky.”

“Even so, the Fourth Army should have received news of your death in battle—— The princess would definitely not accept

it. The worst case would be the nation getting embroiled in civil war.”

“I really hope she won’t lose her composure so easily.”

“Well, I never imagined you would visit in the guise of a cute girl. This really surprised me.”

“C-Cute...!? Erm... I am a 20 year old man...”

He knew he looked young, but the term girl is used to describe woman who wasn’t of age.

“I know, don’t worry. I’m the type who place more weight on the personality. I am good at intellectual discussion, and often made women laugh. I’m not interested in men. No, I am interested in Regis d’Auric though?”

“Haha.. You may ask me anything. As long as it don’t involve the princess.”

“And return, I just need to introduce that person to you right?”

“I will be counting on you...But I hope you can help me with one more thing. Which is to get a testimony out of Marquis Beclard.”

“Regarding what?”

“... The details of the Emperor’s passing.”

Claude shook his head.

“Impossible. I want to interview him too, but I can’t even meet him.”

“If you ask that highly positioned person in the courts?”

“Ah—... If that person asked, that may be possible. But Beclard is backed by Latreille, the Emperor-in-waiting. He will never testify against the prince.”

“It’s a bit dated, but there is a book called ‘General Gordon’. It is a nice read. It was serialized for many years, but it stopped at volume 20 before the story ended, and I have been looking forward to future volumes.”

“I saw it in a bookshop before. But I am not really interested in fiction...”

“This is a work based on events that actually happened 200 years ago though.”

“Hmm? Well, alright... How is the story?”

“In that work, there is a strategy that just happen to fit the current situation.”

The corner of Claude’s eyes twitched.

“That is... which mean, this is the strategy of the renowned Regis d’Auric?”

“No no, I just happen to know about it. And the strategy is written on that book.”

“Tell me the details.”

“Will you help me?”

Claude fell silent.

At this moment, Regis judged that this man was reliable. Because those who would just pay lips service will just say “I will help you” before listening to Regis’ strategy. They will listen first, then turn him down with some excuse, all that was possible.

But he was a man who would keep his words. That was why he was so troubled.

“This sounds great, just help him then!”

The one leaning on the screen and accepted unhesitantly was the chief editor.

“Hufufu... If we can get Beclard’s testimony, our sales will definitely double! We will also get to witness the strategy of the Wizard Regis d’Auric, such a chance won’t come again.”

“Potent venom and traps might be hidden behind honeyed words. If we screw up, we might get targeted by Prince Latreille. Right?”

“... Well, it might turn out like that.”

The chief editor said with a laugh:

“What are you saying at this juncture!? Weekly Quarry is already detested by the establishment!”

“Flies are different from bees. Right now, we can still shoo the harassing party away, but if we obtain Beclard’s testimony regarding that incident—— it won’t end with just a sting, we might get swamped completely.”

“Hufufu... What’s wrong Claude? Chicken?”

“Of course not. I will accept even if someone stops me. But I can’t make up my mind since this will involve the publishing company.”

Regis put his fingers on his chin.

“Indeed... Everyone has their loved ones.”

“No, everyone here have no parents, child or siblings. By the way, no wives and girlfriends either.”

“I-Is that so?”

The chief editor sat down beside Claude. He then leaned forward towards Regis.

“Mr Regis. Ah, you are Ms Regina now!”

—— *You can just use Regis here.* Regis thought about that, but didn’t bother to correct him.

Fanrine was surprised by the chief editor’s aura. Franziska seem to think the conversation was getting hard to follow and had given up on thinking about it.

He introduce himself again:

“I am the chief editor of Weekly Quarry—— Ottoman. Well, it’s an alias anyway.”

“That’s fine.”

“Ms Regina, we have raised the flag of rebellion against the current system of the aristocrat controlling all the wealth, and the life of everyone being decided from birth!”

“That’s Liberalism.”

“We are not adamant on overthrowing the Imperial government though. However, we can’t accept a part of the authority hogging the wealth by taking advantage of how numb and ignorant the citizens are.”

“I feel the same way.”

“What do you think needs to be done to change the current system?”

“... From what Mr Ottoman is saying, we need to educate the citizens and make them interested in politics?”

“That is correct, but not enough.”

“Hmm?”

“You don’t know!?”

Regis mentioned that ‘I am just quoting the words of others’, then continued:

“... Why is the masses ignorant and numb towards politics? That’s because nothing will change even if they are knowledgeable and aware—— That’s what they think. They never thought that the country’s system can be changed. So what the people need right now is ‘hope’ correct?”

“Magnificent! As expected of a hero!”

“No no... I just happen to have read Professor Boutter’s ‘National Remodeling Theory’.”

“And the one who chose that opinion out of the countless ‘improvement ideas proposed by authors’ is you, Ms Regina! Ahh, how splendid! As expected of you!”

“Not at all... Well, thank you...”

The compliments won’t stop no matter what he said, so Regis chose to push the discussion forward.

“I will ask directly then. Since both of you know the danger involved, will you still carry out my strategy? I want to make waves about Prince Latreille’s coronation. Such as bringing up a topic that everyone is concerned about.”

Claude nodded.

“I will do it! Beclard is a monster lurking inside the Empire. If we can expose him to the sun, it will be worth dying for.”

“Hehehe, this is the *raison d’etre* of Weekly Quarry.”

“This looked interesting, what’s happening?” Even the men who were working hard at their desks gathered together and surrounded the couch.

It didn’t help even when Claude shouted “I will tell you later, get back to work!”

In the end, Regis explained his plans before all of them.

Chapter 3 - Regis and Bastian

With Claude's introduction, Regis got the chance to meet the man with strong connections within the courts.

On the outer fringe of the capital, there were many rows of civilian residences. After entering an alley and turning left and right, they reached a bar.

It was a building built from red bricks, several times larger than normal houses.

The sun was setting and it was almost time for dinner.

The buildings around it had closed their windows, and pedestrians on the streets were becoming sparse. Only this shop had its windows open, and the light from its gas lamp leaked out.

Above the entrance of the shop was the sign 'Provence'.

This time, Regis, Franziska and Claude arrived here in a group.

This was the base of the liberals, people who detested nobles. Bringing the daughter of a Duke here might stir up all sorts of trouble. It had nothing to do with how equally Fannine treats commoners. After all, not everyone could reach an understanding through dialogue.

Hence, she went back to the camp of Renard Pendu first. She needed to inform Jessica that Regis and Franziska might return later than expected.

As it was dangerous, Regis wanted Franziska to return too, but she still had the duty of being an escort and keeping an eye on Regis. 'It might be dangerous'—— such a reason wouldn't be enough to make her return.

In the end, Regis (in his female attire) was followed by Franziska and Claude, and the three of them sat on a couch.

There was a round table behind a screen, with two double seater couches facing one another.

As there were barrels, tiles and logs stacked around them, it gave an atmosphere of being messy.

Claude lit his smoke. He poured tobacco into a pipe, then lit it with the candle fire. The smoke spread out slowly.

In this era, tobacco was a luxury item. Other drugs were cheaper than it.

"My headache won't go away if I don't take a puff."

"Hah..."

"I sent a messenger in the afternoon... But I don't know if he made contact successfully. Maybe we won't get to meet this person today?"

"I will wait. I've already troubled the folks in the publishing company, the only thing I can do is wait here. The deadline will be in three days."

Uwah~ Franziska stretched her back.

"So drowsy..."

“It’s fine for you to go back...”

“If I don’t bring Regina back with me, Sis will lecture me.”

“I will return. Because I need you all too.”

“Like I told you, consider the number of the mercenaries to be halved... Because I don’t trust you completely yet, understand?”

“I see. It can’t be helped then.”

The other side of the screen turned rowdy.

A short while later, a woman appeared.

She had a walking stick in hand. A shawl was draped over her dark blue blouse, and a long dress covered her feet.

She seemed older than Regis, but younger than Claude.

Her legs seemed to be weak as her steps were wobbly.

Her bundled brown hair hung over her chest.

“It’s been a while, Claude.”

“Yo, you seem really lively, Professeur!”

—— *So this is Madame Morgane Bourgine*, Regis thought.

She was just thirty odd years of age, but looked really dignified.

“Since that child came, I have been able to eat with ease. But

the High Britannian cookings of the other child is still lacking.”

“Aren’t High Britannian dishes just fried fish and chips?”

“There’s more than that. But since those aren’t edible, I am teaching her Belgarian dishes for now.”

“Hahaha!”

“Well then... Is the person you want to introduce to me here?”

“Ahh, the one we need to trouble is actually the student of the Professeur... He has close ties to the courts. However, I think Professeur will be interested in meeting this person too — This is the strategist Regis d’Auric. Even though he is dressed like this.

“Pleased to meet you.”

Regis stood up and nodded politely.

Bourgine nodded in response.

“Oh... Your hobby surprised me though.”

“T-That’s not it!”

“Fufu, just kidding. There must be some reason behind this right? There are many people who frequent this place, so this happens frequently—— I already asked that child to come, he should be here soon. Just talk to him about the courts slowly.”

“Thank you very much.”

“It’s a rare chance to meet you, so can I speak with you a little?”

“Of course.”

Claude helped Bourguine onto the couch.

Even when seated, her back was really straight.

“Even though you are a commoner, you have deep connections with Prince Latreille and Princess Argentina, isn’t that a rare sight?”

“Ahh, speaking of which...”

By the way, Regis also played Chess and Rummy with the Fifth Princess Felicia.

He was used to it, so he didn’t give it much thought. But now that she mentioned it, he realized that no one around him had similar experience.

Regis was the only one who had acted in the capacity of staff officer in both Altina and Latreille’s camp.

“I am asking because you have such experience... What would the country they are striving for look like?”

“... Like Prince Latreille’s speech to the masses, his goal is to subjugate the surrounding nations and make the Empire great again. If he becomes Emperor, the neighbouring countries we are familiar with would become Imperial territory.”

“He is a hegemonist after all. Do you think he can pull it off?”

“I heard his plans in detail.”

“From the perspective of a strategist, do you think it can be done?”

“I am just a normal Admin Officer. Leaving that aside... If the Imperial Commanders are as competent as Field Marshall Latreille, that would be possible.”

“You are saying that the Empire is strong, but lacks the talented personnel?”

“It’s regrettable.”

What they indeed lacked wasn’t talent, but Regis didn’t probe further.

Bourgine continued:

“Well then, what’s Princess Argentina’s ideal? Because her mother is a commoner, word on the street is that she leads a simple lifestyle. And she got the support of many commoners because of that, but is it the truth?”

“... Her life isn’t that extravagant. She’s not exactly living like a commoner, but she doesn’t splurge on unnecessary parties. She would not hold back on buying art pieces and dresses, but is far from wasteful. Well, Prince Latreille is thrifty too. The two of them aren’t fools. And Princess Argentina’s aspiration is——”

Bourgine listened quietly.

Claude might seem unconcerned, but his eyes had the gleam of seriousness.

Franziska look like she was going to fall asleep.

Regis opened his mouth:

“—— The Princess’ goal is world peace.”

Bourgine tilted her head.

“Is that her stance in public? Or are you being serious?”

“There is no point in regurgitating a story meant for the public. The Princess is really aiming for world peace. Not just dreaming or hoping, but moving forward with that goal in mind. It’s the same for me too.”

Claude opened his eyes wide.

Bourgine lowered her head.

“... And world peace means...?”

“Pacifism. Living harmoniously with the neighbouring countries, and aiding whichever country gets invaded, and giving aid if one of the nations suffers a natural disaster.”

“That might be plausible... But is that what the Princess really thinks?”

“At least we are doing that. We won’t rob others of their possession, and Madame Bourguine isn’t someone who will seize the land of others either.”

“Yes... It’s true that going by my sense of morals—— people who bereave the territory of one’s neighbours are as deplorable as bandits.”

“Correct, military might is necessary, but using it to conquer the land of others sounds barbaric to me. It would be criticized by others, and make it hard to gain trust and friendships.”

“Isn’t that just an ideal?”

“Right, it is just ideology. But if this theory doesn’t hold, mankind probably would have gone extinct long ago.”

“Oh, so that’s how you think.”

“So far, wars are mainly fought with arrows and spears. When we say a unit had been wiped out, it actually meant that most of the soldiers had been routed with injuries, with less than half of them killed in action. But we are moving into an era of war with rifles now. There won’t be any chance to escape before attacks sharper than spears and further than arrows would be onto them. The term wiped out would be literal then... and the massacre of civilians would be more cruel and thorough than in the age of cavalries.”

Claude said with a choke:

“... Is this true?”

Bourguine nodded seriously.

“So you mean that right now, war is a competition on the battlefield, but future war would mean the utter destruction of the enemy?”

“That’s what I think. The improvement in the capability of rifles has reached a stunning level in just a few years. I predict that it would improve even further in the future. After all, there are already people developing models that can fire

consecutive shots.”

“Consecutive shots?”

“Making loading automatic. The designs right now is impractical as it is too cumbersome to be carried by one man, but I think it is only a matter of time before it is miniaturized for one person to handle it. Using political terms to explain, that means we have to consider things that will happen even after our deaths.”

“Yes, you are right.”

Franziska who had been listening all this while sneered:

“Hmmp... It’s a fine ideal, but how many nations with a grudge against the Belgarian Empire do you think there are? After fighting against the surrounding nations for hundreds of years, and you want to work together with them now? Haha... If one nation attacks the Empire, the other countries would definitely join the attack.”

“Well, it is difficult to build alliance with other nations after all. There are elements of ideals involved, but I am not spouting empty dreams.”

“This is obviously impossible!”

“If everyone in power gave up on this and chose the path of war, mankind would already be extinct.”

“Hah? If the war rages on and on, the ones who lives in the end are the victors right?”

Regis shook his head.

“For example, the Empire with a population of 1 million won in the end... And a civil war broke out. If the side with 500 thousand won, and another civil war erupt...”

“Why are you so sure that will happen!?”

“Isn’t that a given? After all, the surviving group chose the option ‘war and pillage’.”

Franziska was at a loss for words.

“Ah...”

“War and pillage—— Do you think a group that won after picking this option will suddenly change their directive? This have nothing to do with the governing system. The aging of the leaders, natural disasters and invention of new weapons... All these negative and positive factors are influencing them. And even without interference from these factors... war will still erupt. Rifles will kill their enemy.”

“... Hmm.”

“The ones who live will be the victors. And since they won, there is no reason to change their thinking. Because they have a stranglehold on wealth. One million becomes 500 thousand, half that to 250 thousand... The population will gradually decline. It is clear what is the endpoint of hegemonism. Those who chose war with the excuse ‘we can’t survive if we don’t fight’, will only have one future.”

“A-And what is that?”

“If mankind don’t realize that we can’t keep fighting wars, in time, they will lose civilization, and it will be too late. Would the final moments be an apocalypse, or attack by feral

beasts...? I don't know how it would end, but it is inevitable. No, maybe... maybe we will devolve into animals that 'once had civilization'."

"Aren't you thinking too much?"

"This isn't my imagination though. There are examples of species going extinct in the past because they couldn't adapt to their environment. There are numerous cases of countries weakening due to civil war and getting destroyed by other nations. You probably know that too."

Franziska was born in the Germanian Federation. Civil wars broke out there frequently, and with them came the falling and founding of nations.

If they continued warring among themselves, and even incorporated rifles in their warfare, it won't be long before the Germanian Federation falls—— Regis thought.

He said firmly:

"Those who support hegemonism are completely clueless to what moving into the era of Rifle warfare means. Even if they keep scoring victories, what awaits them is just a throne over a kingdom scattered with bones."

Franziska couldn't say anything.

Bourguine nodded.

"I have not seen the new rifles used by the Kingdom of High Britannia. But since you said so, they must be worthy of your evaluation."

"High Britannia has yet to unleash the full potential of the

new rifles.”

“Is that so? I heard the Imperial forces lost a lot of men.”

“We were lucky. If we had encountered an opponent who could use rifles more efficiently, there would be even more casualties. Maybe the capital would have fallen.”

Claude wiped the sweat on his brows.

“Thank god you are not a High Britannian.”

“I think their commander already noticed... But he had no choice but to follow the Queen’s sense of aesthetic.”

Ugh, Claude leaned forth.

“Are rifles really that powerful?”

“Even a child can kill a knight by pulling the trigger. There is a need to review our understanding of war.”

“Ohh...”

His shoulders kept quivering.

The other side of the screen turned noisy.

Claude looked in that direction.

“Is that the student of the Professeur? Hmm? No... This is...”

The angry shouts of men, sounds of metal and screams.

Franziska stood up and immediately took out the short crossbow from her bag.

“That’s the sound of armour!”

After clicking his tongue, Claude stood up too.

He reached for the back of his waist and pulled out a dagger.

The screen was kicked down.

Soldiers!

They all wore black armour. There were ten... No, twenty of them...?

“Found it!”

—— *What!? They aren’t the Imperial Guards or the First Army!?*

Regis had never seen this armour. However, the emblems of the Empire were graphed on them, so they should be regular soldiers.

The leader of the troopers stared at them with sharp eyes, his lips twitched.

“Well well... We hit the jackpot huh?”

He was a man with a sharp nose. He was short and didn’t wear armour, but the chest of his uniform was decorated with medals and gems. His eyes were as narrow as a fox.

Regis remembered this man.

He was the inspector who bought the orders letter to attack Fort Volks 8 months ago.

When he attempted to assault Clarisse, Regis ran into him. In the end, the crisis was averted thanks to Eric and Altina...

“Inspector Becker!?”

Regis blurted out unconsciously.

That man glared at him.

“Ah? What, a woman...? Hmmp, have I seen you somewhere before? And I am not just an inspector anymore, but the Brigade Commander of the Public Security Corps!”

“What, impossible... Didn’t you get prosecuted for attempted rape and soliciting for bribery...!?”

“Hah? I am the nephew of Chief Chamberlain Beclard! The second son of a Marquis family! Small matters that happened during my tour of inspection won’t bring me down!”

“... You weren’t tried for your crimes?”

“How dare a plebeian like you talk to me so arrogantly. Hey, seize her! But don’t kill her alright? Be careful not to scratch her face.”

The soldiers in black armour closed in with their swords in hand.

The blades were bloodied.

Bourgine admonished him sternly:

“The lot of you! Did you cut down the people here!?”

“Hah! I have gotten wind of rebels gathering in this bar. I am merely doing my part in keeping the peace inside the capital.”

“How could this be... not even a trial!?”

“I am the law! If you don’t like it, then file a complaint! However, that’s only if you are still alive tomorrow!”

A soldier in black armour reported to Becker:

“Brigade Commander Sir, that is Bourguine!”

“Is that so, kill her!”

“Huh!? But... The minister say we have to apprehend...”

“Didn’t you hear what I said!? How can we let it go to trial!? Dead people won’t complain, run or rebuke me! Isn’t that a model citizen!?”

“Y-Yes Sir!”

“Good, turn her into a model citizen!”

The soldiers roared. As if this was a battlefield. However, Regis didn’t have any troops with him.

Claude rushed forth to protect Bourguine.

“Run! You can’t die in a place like this, Professeur!”

Becker ordered:

“Don’t let her escape! If she gets away, all of you will be lashed!”

The soldiers charged. This place was cramped with no place to run. Not even a window to jump out from.

—— *We will die if this goes on!*

Regis yelled:

“Let’s make a deal!”

If he stalled for time...

Becker roared:

“Ignore him!”

It seemed that the same tactic won’t work again.

But the soldiers were different. They were a little hesitant.

Regis didn’t give up.

“Are you all sure about this!? The Brigade Commander might be a noble, but do you think he can protect his subordinates!? Why do you think the Minister issued the order directly in your presence!? You really think ignoring the order to apprehend Madame Bourgine is a good idea!?”

“Don’t speak nonsense! I ordered you to kill, so go kill her! Whoever defies me is also a rebel! Execute them too!”

Maybe Becker really killed his subordinates before.

The soldiers only hesitated momentarily.

And then they followed their orders and raised their swords.

—— It's no good huh.

The situation was too terrible. There wasn't any tactics he could use to buy time. After the soldiers heard Becker's words, there wasn't even room for negotiation.

Chink—— The soft metallic sound from a short crossbow.

A bolt fired from so close pierced the neck of a black armour trooper.

“Guahh!?”

“The only way is to fight then!”

Franziska shouted.

She shot in quick succession as if she had just woken from her slumber, felling three men immediately. As expected of a mercenary from Renard Pendu.

But the number of soldiers charging in was too many.

They were before them in no time.

A sword thrust forward.

She dodged the first attack.

“Ugh...!? I won't be taken down by such a dull-witted sword!”

“Hyaaahhhhh——!”

Three soldiers slashed at her at the same time next. They seemed to be well trained, leaving no room to evade.

Franziska blocked one attack with her short crossbow. With the sound of twisting metal, the bowstring snapped. The delicate frame broke.

It couldn't even be used to block now.

Her feet hit the couch. It was just too cramped.

A slash by a soldier—— Cut into Franziska's flank.

“Ugh!?”

Her thin body flew into the air.

And rolled onto the floor.

“~~~!? Ugh... Bweahhh...!!”

She spewed out the red fluid gushing out from her throat. The floor was dyed red from blood.

But Regis remained stiff on the couch.

The soldiers raised their swords again.

This time, they closed in on Claude and Bourguine.

“Ugh!”

With just his dagger, he probably couldn't even stall them.

Becker ordered:

“Kill that man too! He probably is rebel scum anyway!”

“You bastard!”

“S-Stop it! You got the wrong person!”

Regis opened his arms.

But the soldiers wouldn't stop.

The blades slashed at Bourguine and Claude.

Something leapt over the heads of the soldiers.

For an instant, it seemed to be a beast of some kind. The shadow that landed swung his short sword at the same time.

Blood splattered.

The black armoured soldier's sword—— fell to the ground, with his hand still holding the blade.

A young man with brown hair landed before Claude and Bourguine.

“Phew~... What's going on? Leaving apprehension aside, isn't it strange for this to devolve into murder?”

He had glasses made with smoked crystals—— Sunglasses.

And a short sword in hand.

The entire blade looked like an elongated triangle. It was about 4Pa (30cm) in length.

It was double bladed, but as thin as paper.

Regis didn't see the actual item before, but saw sketches of it.

—— *Is that Vite Espace Trois!?*

In that case this person is...



Bourgine said:

“You are reliable as usual, Bastian.”

“I should be apologizing for being late. If I realized the commotion earlier... Ehh... That is!?”

Bastian opened his eyes wide as he looked at Franziska who was lying on the floor.

“You are Fran!?”

“Ugh...”

She lifted her head with a groan.

With only one eye opened.

“... Ah? Bastian...?”

“What are you doing here!? Ah, no, leave that for later! I will settle this right now, hang in there! Don’t die on me now!”

He said as he removed his sunglasses.

He glared at the soldiers with his crimson eyes.

With his crimson eyes which only the royals of Belgarian possessed in plain view, he said——

“I am the third prince of Belgaria, Heinrich Trois Bastian de Belgaria! Why are you pointing your blades at Professeur Bourgine? And you even hurt my friend?”

The black armoured troopers took one step back.

Becker roared at them:

“Imbeciles! Why would a Prince appear in a place like this!? Imposter! That imposter is definitely disrupting the peace in the Empire! Kill him! Make sure he is dead! If you don’t want to die, kill him!”

“Ah? I heard Grandpa say that the Public Security Corps is being formed. I thought it would take some time, but they can already be deployed huh.”

The soldiers were hesitant, but just like that time with Regis just now—— they were pressured by Becker’s words and closed in with their swords.

Bastian took a light breath.

“I’m sorry, but when it is time to protect... I won’t hold back.”

His body moved for a moment. Regis didn’t understand what he was doing.

The three attacking soldiers fell at the same time.

Blood sprouted from the gaps of the armour at their waist.

The soldiers behind them gasped.

Bastian brushed the short sword that was stained with blood.

“... Bro... is faster than this. So, I... have to be even faster. I need to be faster.”

“U-Ughh...!?”

Becker kicked the back of a trembling trooper.

“Why did you retreat without orders, you trash!”

“B-Brigade Commander!?”

The soldiers wailed.

Becker was holding a handgun.

He pointed it at Bastian.

“Even if you are a royal... it’s all the same if you are dead!”

“... Are you serious about that?”

Ha! Becker’s grin was so wide it almost tore his face in two. He glared with his bloodshot eyes.

He pulled the trigger with his right hand’s index finger.

Splat, a piece of meat fell to the ground.

The gun remained silent.

“Eh?”

Becker looked down, then screamed immediately. The thing on the floor was his index finger.

“Hyaaahh~~!? Fin~~~~ ger~~~!? My... Finger~!?”

“It’s better to hear your statement in court. Let me say this first—— Don’t even think of doing anything stupid. You will end up worse than that wound. If you pick up any guns or

blades, I will aim for your heart next.”

“Ahhhh~~!?”

Bastian seemed to have thrown a knife with his other hand.

Regis couldn't even see his throwing motion, much less what he threw.

He only knew that a knife hit Becker's hand.

And his finger fell off.

Judging from these facts, Bastian was the one who threw it — he could only conclude that.

Bastian said to the soldiers from the Public Security Corps:

“I think all the problems so far have been caused by the commander. But if you want to continue to fight, I won't forgive you. What say you?”

“.....”

Clank, a black armoured soldier toss his sword onto the ground.

The other soldiers followed suit one by one.

They knelt down with their helmets off, and lowered their heads.

“Your Highness, forgive us! W-We...”

“It's fine if you understand. Throw that moron into an isolation cell in the Military Affairs Ministry. Let my brother

and the Minister determine his crimes. Trying to murder innocent citizens is making a mockery of the law.”

“That... That person Bourguine over there, might be a rebel...”

“Is there any proof? Just because she is a liberal? Because she gave a speech in the plaza in front of the palace? None of this is against the law.”

“W-We are not sure of the details either...”

“If you don’t want the nation to fall apart, then do your own research and form your own opinions. Enough, go. I am busy here.”

The soldiers bowed deeply, then carried Becker who was screaming “It hurts it hurts” out and left.

Franziska was placed onto the couch, and her clothes removed.

Her clothes were torn at the waist, but the chainmail under it still held.

Because she jumped to soften the impact of the blow, she managed to minimize her injury.

Regis touched Franziska’s sides.

There was a large bruise stretched over it.

Her face twisted from the pain.

“Ughh...”

“Answer me by nodding or shaking your head. Does it hurt

when you breath? Do you feel nauseous, any ringing in your ears? Alright then, does the inside of your abdomen hurts? Here? Here? What about here?"

"!?"

"Ah, looks like this is the part that hurts. Hmm... Two broken ribs. You will need to see a doctor, but you will live. You puked blood because the impact hurt your stomach. You will need time to recuperate. Just drink soup for now."

"... Ugh... That's my own problem..."

"It's great that you survived. Thank you very much for protecting me."

Regis held her hand tightly.

Franziska clicked her tongue. But she didn't shake away his hand.

"... Is that true?"

"Eh?"

"Was I... of use? Will big bro... praise me...?"

"I don't know what he thinks, but both of us are still alive. This is definitely to the Mercenary King's advantage."

"... Is that so. That's good then..."

"It would be hard to sleep because of the pain, but still try to lie down and rest. I will get the doctor."

"Yes."

Nodding lightly, she closed her eyes and clenched her teeth to endure the pain.

The shop owner called for a carriage, and Regis' group left the bar.

Bourgine's home——

It was a cheap two-story building in a condition that made it surprising that people actually lived here.

They went up the half broken stairs to the entrance of a small flat and, peeking inside, one could see four chairs surrounded by mountains of books.

It was already late at night, but the doctor Bourguine was acquainted with came over, and treated Franziska's wound splendidly.

He secured her sides to a board with bandages. Her injury was just as Regis diagnosed. It would take a month or two before making a full recovery.

It wasn't clear how her internal organs were, but they should call him if she vomited blood again—— the doctor instructed before leaving.

After leaving Franziska to sleep in the bedroom, Regis and the others gathered in the living room.

“Phew...”

Regis sat on the chair and exhaled.

“Thank you for your hard work.”

A blonde girl with blue eyes served them coffee.

She had a gentle but dignified air about her. Even Regis who paid little attention to the attractiveness of ladies was mesmerized for a moment.

Her name was Elise Archibald, a friend of Bastian.

She wasn't too tall, and looked about 13—— but she was actually 16 years old like Bastian. Fortunately, Regis didn't bring up the topic of her age.

Regis received the mug filled with brown liquid.

“Thank you—— hmm, delicious.”

“Fufu, I'm glad.”

Aside from Regis and Elise, the house owner Bourguine, reporter Claude and Bastian were also present.

Regis bowed at Bastian and introduced himself again.

“Thank you very much for your help earlier. I am Regis d'Auric, the strategist of the Fourth Princess.”

“Ehh!?”

Bastian tilted his head.

“Ha, haha... There is a good reason... on why I'm dressed like this.”

Claude and Bourguine also guaranteed his identity.

Bastian's face became even more astonished.

"Isn't Regis d'Auric the strategist that defeated High Britannia's 'Queen's Navy'?"

He heard this news when he was hiding anonymously in the mansion of a noble in High Britannia.

Regis scratched his head.

"... I held command as the acting Fleet Admiral back then."

"Aren't you the hero that led the Belgarian Empire towards victory in this war!?"

"... I didn't do it alone."

"Such a weak looking guy!?"

"... Sorry about that."

"I thought you would be a man as large as a bear—— But you are actually a woman."

"No!?"

This happened several times already, so he was used to it.

Regis explained that because Latreille was after his life, he had to disguise himself like this.

Bastian looked impressed as he stared at Regis.

“Indeed, now that you mentioned it, your hair is a little crooked...?”

“Ah... Well, that’s because my actions were too intense. Maybe I should return to my original appearance for now.”

Regis took off his wig.

But he felt even more embarrassed as he was wearing a dress, so he put it on again.

Bastian opened his eyes wide.

“Ehhh!?”

“Anything else looks weird?”

“It is already weird for a man to wear women’s clothings.”

“Ahaha... that’s...”

“Hmmm, have we met before?”

“Huh?”

It was Regis’ turn to stare at the other party.

Crimson pupils and brown hair.

“You are the third prince of Belgaria, Heinrich Trois Bastian de Belgaria correct...?”

He said so himself during the fight at the bar, so that’s probably right.

“Yes, but that’s not the problem! Inside the palace’s library!

Ah, maybe you can remember it this way.”

Bastian put on his sunglasses.

“Hmm?”

“You really don’t remember!? You said that if I write an amazing masterpiece in the future you would read it!”

“... Ah... Could it be, you are that kid who borrowed the ‘Frozen Rain Sword and the Nine wings’? I was surprised when you ran off without going through the loan procedures, but I still said I didn’t see anything when the Minister of Ceremony came in.”

“Don’t worry, I returned that book to the library properly. I read it to the very last page.”

“That’s great. So... The boy I met then was the third Prince... What a surprise.”

Regis looked at Bastian nostalgically.

But the other party had a bemused expression.

“You are really a weird man.”

“Ehh? Well, others tell me that often...”

“Normal people will be polite and reserved before royals. Well, I’m not good with handling a solemn atmosphere, so just stay this way. That’s even better.”

“You are right... I spoke with other royals a lot, and got carried away... My apologies.”

“Enough, I already said I am not good with solemn atmosphere right? I am just curious. By the way, you were Argentina and Latreille’s strategist, and so you are used to interacting with royals right?”

“That’s true, my attitude might be different if I wasn’t Her Highness’ strategist.”

“Haha... Leave the bothersome to the palace. Please call me Bastian. Regis is the teacher after all!”

“T-Teacher!?”

“You taught me about books. After that, I read so many of them... I am even dabbling into writing myself.”

“Ohh, that’s wonderful!”

“I haven’t written anything satisfactory yet... It is hard to come up with a cool protagonist.”

“I see, that’s very important. The popular trends recently ——”

“Ahem.”

As they were getting heated up over their story discussion, Elise interjected:

“Bastian, let’s talk about this later. We have more important matters to discuss right now.”

“Ara, right.”

“Haha... I didn’t notice...”

With a cough, they ended their conversation before they began their story. Bastian asked Regis to confirm:

“You mentioned that Latreille is after your life?”

“I might have angered him by turning down his request to be his strategist.”

“Bro is still the same huh.”

“... There were similar incidents?”

As the conversation progressed, Bastian divulged his information freely. This was like doing business without stating any request.

He must be a wealthy man. He didn't really seem to want other people's things.

“Latreille... He killed his own father...”

“This rumour is already spreading in the courts.”

“Regis knew too right. But there isn't any proof. Just like that time with my brother Auguste. In the end, nothing came to light because of the grand nobles backing him.”

“Well... who knows?”

“Eh?”

“It's true that authority can cover up the truth. But we need to tell Prince Latreille that a new era is upon us.”

“Oh.”

Bastian was dumbfounded.

Fufufu... Bourgine laughed.

“What bold words to say about the Crown Prince that will be coronated in three days. This isn’t some empty boasting in a bar, you are actually serious about this?”

“It might just be brave words... But to make it come true, I hope you all can help me.”

“If it coincides with our ideals.”

Bourgine nodded.

Elise even prepared supper. She placed the sandwich onto the table.

“What are you planning to do? Ah, please have one.”

Thinking about it now, Regis hasn’t even taken dinner.

“Thank you, I will dig in now.”

“It can’t be helped huh!? I will eat one then!”

Bastian reached for the sandwich.

Muu, Elise frowned:

“It’s not that bad alright?”

They are really close—— Regis started eating the sandwich with a wry smile.

If he was to express his unfiltered thoughts.

—— Is this rotten?

The thing that resembled this smelly thing the most would be moist rubbish. Rotten vegetables, and this texture as rough as sand, was that meat?

“... Uwah.”

Regis wanted to spit it out on reflex, but managed to hold it in.

Bastian finished his sandwich in one go.

“The trick is to not breath or chew too much. Don’t force yourself though? This must be hard for a noble to accept.”

“No no, I’m a commoner. Although I was given a chevalier title recently.”

“Ah, right. When I met you in the library, you were wearing the military uniform for commoners.”

“Yes... Yes...”

Regis drank the coffee to wash the lingering stink in his mouth.

“Madame Bourgine is a famous liberal. If you are her student, then Prince Bastian is a liberal too?”

“You think that’s strange too?”

“No, the Princess I am serving is against the current system too—— but even so, she didn’t think about abolishing the aristocratic system.”

“Why do you think it would be better to maintain the aristocracy?:

“The citizens are not capable of discussing politics yet. Without the current aristocracy, the political power will fall into the hands of the people, then swindler with the glib to incite the masses will become dictators.”

Claude raised his hand.

“Sorry to interrupt... What do you mean by the glib to incite the masses... Can you give an example?”

“... Simply put, it’s giving the masses an easy to understand enemy. And the truth doesn’t matter. For example—— Making speeches about the royals looking down on the citizens—— spreading such fictitious news.”

“Wouldn’t the lies be refuted?”

“Their plan is to run after saying their piece. Because it is hard to prove such baseless things. And lies on such a level would be enough to deceive the crowd. Furthermore, the masses want an enemy. People get deceived because they want to be deceived.”

“... I see.”

“For example, saying a neighbouring country acted inappropriately—— That would be enough. Anything goes. Just give the masses an enemy, and tell them you want to gather everyone’s power to fight against the enemy, if they

say that... they will gradually gain more supporters. And now, the masses could be incited this simply. That's why we can't leave politics to them."

"Haha... If Mr Regis is born in High Britannia, history might be different. The citizens in that nation have rights."

"And they were embroiled in a reckless invasive war. The incited group will often move clumsily towards aggressive actions. Only a tragic fate awaits them."

"If they defeated the Belgaria Empire, their evaluation would be... No, let's stop here. Sorry for intruding."

Claude shrugged.

Regis sipped on his second cup of coffee.

"No... In any case, I think it is still too early to abolish the aristocracy."

"So you want to do so in the future?"

"In order to achieve my ideals of Pacifism, it is necessary for the citizens to have rights after all."

Bastian nodded.

"I have a friend. He studied under Professeur Bourguine—— and wanted to bring freedom to the Belgarian Empire. I will make it come true one day... his goal... in the future."

"Yes."

"People who are born into aristocratic families can live extravagant lives, while those who are born commoners

would be oppressed their entire life. Isn't that unfair."

"This is a problem of freedom in choosing one's career. And also, the problem of tax burden and individual rights."

Bourgine nodded quietly. Like a teacher watching her students exchange their views, she didn't participate in this discussion.

Bastian said vexingly:

"But... Latreille said that it is only natural that it is unfair."

Regis was surprised momentarily.

"You talked to Prince Latreille about liberalism!?"

"Ahh, I was thinking of charging in straight—— but I got smashed."

"What did he say?"

"The aristocrats learn from a young age on how to manage people, land and command troops. For commoners, only the most exceptional of the exception could do that."

"Not everyone has an equal chance at education."

"That is true... It is impossible for all the citizens of the Empire to receive the noble's standard of education. I researched it myself too, it can't be done!"

Bastian who got emotional turned sullen. Bourguine supplemented the fact in a calm tone from the sideline:

"I worked as a teacher in the past, and only boys from

wealthy family could afford to attend school.”

In the Belgarian Empire during this era, there were no public schools.

Schools funded by wealthy commoners and aristocrats—— required a high amount of school fees.

And schools set up by the church—— where classes were held after prayers, didn’t charge any fee but only held one session a week.

Grand nobles would hire tutors to homeschool their children. And of course, the fees involved would be on another level.

By the way, aside from the children of nobles, teacher is a vocation many people wish to take up, and female commoner teacher were rare in this field.

Regis nodded.

“Prince Latreille is right. By giving special education to the nobles, we can nurture talented people. The Belgarian Empire became strong because of such a system.”

“You think bro is right?”

“Well, it was true in the past. But the times have changed.”

“Ehh?”

Bastian tilted his head.

Regis picked up the books piled on the floor.

“It’s books. They can change the world. It is impossible for all

commoners to employ home teachers, getting all of them to attend school is also difficult. But teaching them to read and write is still possible. After that, they can learn by themselves by reading books. Books might still be expensive, but their price will fall with the advent of technology. One day, even children will be able to afford books.”

Bastian stared hard at the books.

“This thing huh...”

“Your Highness also gleamed more knowledge by reading books right? Books can change people and change the world, that’s how I feel.”

“Anyone can become like you?”

“Ah, no... If everyone becomes like me, this country’s existence will be in danger. But as a commoner, I had to work hard in order to read books... But if someone tightens their budget, it won’t be impossible.”

“I don’t know if such a lifestyle is a good thing... But if books become cheaper, there will be more people reading them, will we be able to change the nation then?”

“I think the country will definitely change.”

“... Is that so... If there are books, his dreams... will come true.”

Bastian’s eyes turned moist, and he rubbed the corner of his eyes with his hand.

Regis realized something from his actions, but he didn’t bring it up.

Bourgine muttered:

“I... think books can change the world too. People who will blindly follow the aristocrats will strive for freedom and equality after reading books and exchanging opinions... Then there would be more liberals.”

“That is so.”

“But in the end, speeches were suppressed.”

“We almost died just now.”

She then asked Regis straightforwardly:

“Regis d’Auric... You are an outstanding strategist, well versed in politics, economics, science and good sense of ethics. Please tell me your views—— what needs to be done to change this nation?”

His words were stuck in his throat.

He knew the answer.

But, how could he say it out loud?

“.....”

Claude leaned forward.

“Well, how about this? Regis was planning to deal a huge blow to Latreille, or declare war against him right? That’s why you need Prince Bastian’s help. And in return for his assistance, what you can do is answer Professeur Bourguine’s question. What say you?”

As expected of a proposal by a reporter. His livelihood involves dealing with information after all.

Bastian shrugged.

“I will only help you if I think this is the right thing to do.”

“I can’t really judge if involving stakes during an exchange of views is a good or bad thing...”

Regis sighed.

His ability to set up such an atmosphere was a testament of how good Claude’s oral skill was. Instead of a reporter, he might be more suited to be a diplomat?

I will help you unconditionally—— Even if the other party says so, Regis couldn’t keep his thoughts to himself.

Regis tidied the words in his mind.

“... Since books can change this world, it can change this nation of course. However, even if the citizens are deeply knowledgeable, it won’t be enough to change the system. They would just be oppressed... I’m a pacifist and detest war. I don’t want to see anyone die... So, even though I don’t want to say this... But to change this country, what the citizens need to do... is an armed rebellion.”

Armed rebellion.

Which means the citizens had to pick up weapons and attack the Administration.

Bourgine frowned.

“Such movement happened in many other cities. And then, the army came and many died... This country still didn’t change.”

“Well, even if the citizens pick up bows and lances, they can’t defeat knights. A hundred of them might win against one knight though.”

Bastian pointed with his right index finger.

“What about rifles?”

“... That’s what I want to talk about.”

Regis sighed:

“I don’t want this to happen for real... That’s why, I hope Her Highness could become Empress, and improve relations with neighbouring nations peacefully. And then reduce the inequality between aristocrats and commoners in stages... I hope to achieve a revolution without bloodshed. But there is another way that is viable—— Increase the people's wisdom with books, then use rifles to start an armed rebellion...”

“And abolish the aristocracy?”

“If you ask for that, the nobles will resist in full force. In order to win a war, it is not advisable to let the opponent fight with all their might. For instance, it would be realistic to propose the formation of a senate in order for the representatives of the people to participate in politics.”

“And that would be enough?”

“If they can take part in politics, they can build schools to

further educate the commoners. And there would be more military commanders who are commoners. After the commoners gain more influence and rights, there would be nobles who will want to assist. The senate would be like a hole at the bottom of the aristocratic ship.”

Claude stood up from his chair.

“Isn’t that a good idea?”

“Don’t be daft... Just like how the High Britannian troops with rifles lost to Belgian cavalry in the end, it’s not so simple.”

“Isn’t that because the strategist Regis d’Auric is guiding them?”

“The weak points of rifles lies in their supply. If there is no ammunition, rifles can’t be fired. And right now, the Empire doesn’t have the facilities to produce the bullets for the new rifles. Even if they can be produced, it will be hard for them to fall into the citizen’s hand.”

“It can’t be done?”

“Field Marshall gave his orders for the blacksmiths of Rouen city to research it... But it will probably take some time.”

“The Blacksmiths huh.”

Hmm, Claude nodded.

Well then—— he squatted down before Regis.

“The man called Regis d’Auric... There must be more than just this.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Books can change the views of the citizens. Rifles and ammunition can greatly increase the success rate of an armed rebellion. But other people can understand this much too. That’s why rifles and bullets won’t fall into the hands of commoners so easily, and the aristocrats won’t open schools for the sake of commoners—— Is that all? You must have thought further than that.”

“Like I said, my goal is for the Princess to become Empress.”

“No, not that. You should have more practical plan of making an armed revolution a success. That’s why you hesitated just now.”

“... Mr Claude, you know about it?”

“I’m asking because I don’t know. I am just a reporter who caught scent that the other party is hiding something.”

“... Hah... Can you promise to keep it off the records? This is just something shared between Madame Bourgine, Bastian and the few of us in this room. If it is carried out, it will led to massive bloodshed.”

Bastian and Elise nodded.

Bourgine said:

“I am not in favour of an armed rebellion though.”

“It can’t be helped. I won’t note it down, it’s just a pity.”

Claude placed his hand on his chest. This gesture meant he was swearing to god.

Regis nodded.

“From what I heard, Prince Latreille planed to attack all neighbouring nations in the next two years. A large number of rifles would be prepared then. In that case, many commoners will be hired to manufacture rifles and ammunition. Since artillery has less prestige than knightship, the riflemen would mostly be commoners.”

“Hmm? Hey... That means...”

“Yes... the production and usage of rifles will be entrusted to the commoners. And if the core members of the armed rebellion infiltrate inside...”

“I-Indeed. If we can produce rifles, train with them and increase the numbers of our comrades...”

Regis shook his head.

“However, people will still die. And the commoners rising in armed rebellion are unlike a disciplined army. They will partake in unnecessary violence easily. We can’t allow such a tragedy to happen.”

Claude returned to his seat and leaned back onto his chair.

“... Thank you. I will use it for reference. As promised, I will not record it down. At most, I will use it in future topic research.”

“Alright.”

“Well, I don’t think the aristocrats restrain themselves from unnecessary violence either.”

“... That might be so.”

Bourguine nodded.

“It’s true that there is a high chance of success if we follow your plan. But subjugating others through martial might will just be the same as the nobles. I don’t think this will better the nation though?”

Bastian nodded in agreement.

“That’s right! Well, I think we need to fight if we have to, but we should consider other ways too. Citizens fighting knights with rifles should just remain a scene in stories.”

“—— Well then, next would be a more roundabout and peaceful strategy that I thought of. You want to listen?”

Everyone nodded.

Chapter 4 - The Newspaper of August 12th

The next day, August 11th, noon——

Regis walked on the street in female attire like before.

He wore a leather hat that resembled that of a reporter.

Besides him was only Bastian, wearing his sunglasses like usual.

As it might get dangerous, he didn't want Elise to follow them. Furthermore, they had a guest from the south coming this morning and she was to receive them.

A girl shrouded in mystery. She could speak fluent Belgarian without any accent and make High Britannian cuisines—— she probably had her own secrets.

“This is the place.”

Bastian pointed out.

This was the mansion of Chief Chamberlain Beclard.

Even in this area reserved for the residences of nobility, between rows of mansions, this one loomed over them with its sheer magnitude and spear-like fencing.

Two heavy armoured infantry guarded the main gate and there were about a hundred soldiers patrolling the grounds. There seemed to be soldiers inside the mansion too, the security was unbelievably tight.

And from the emblems on their armour, they weren't part of the Imperial Guards or police, but the First Army—— the unit under Latreille's direct command.

Prince Latreille knew that Marquis Beclard was a pillar of his legitimacy, and also his crucial weak point. It was only natural for him to guard his cornerstone.

Bastian scratched his head as he overlooked the mansion.

"It would be great if they would let us in after I state my name..."

"That probably won't work with you being his political enemy. And furthermore he knows you are a liberal."

"Is that so?"

"The plan remains unchanged."

Regis and Bastian approached the main gate.

And of course, the heavy armoured infantry pointed their spears at them.

“Halt!”

Bastian smiled and showed them his empty hands.

“Ahh, don’t worry. We are not any suspicious characters.”

Suspicious characters wouldn’t say that either.

The soldiers didn’t let down their guard and held their stance.

“Who are you?”

“I am the Third Prince Heinrich Trois Bastian de Belgaria.”

Bastian, introducing himself and removing his sunglasses, made the soldiers panic. Being part of the First Army they knew the royal’s faces.

“M-My apologies, Your Highness!”

They retracted their spears and let them pass—— Not.

The soldier didn’t give way.

“I beg your pardon, Sire! Our orders are to stop anyone without permits from passing through this gate!”

“I expected as much. Please show this to Marquis Beclard. You are not going to tell me you won’t allow a letter to be sent right?”

“Erm...”

If it wasn’t for Bastian’s name they wouldn’t even think about it.

But they couldn’t ignore a letter from a royal after all.

It would be hard to tell how they would react if they were just some regional soldiers from the boondocks, but soldiers garrisoned in the capital were civilized. And if the guards of a noble knew etiquettes, they would treat the letters from royals with care. Or at least, they wouldn’t do anything rude.

The soldier received Bastian’s envelope.

“Understood Sire, I will deliver it.”

“My thanks.”

The letter was sent to the mansion.

Regis and Bastian waited right there under the watchful eyes of the soldiers.

Regis was nervous, worried that he might get exposed when Bastian suddenly whispered into his ears:

“It’s fine right?”

“P-Probably? We should have come in the evening... Maybe my makeup is too light...”

“Hey, what are you worried about? I’m talking about getting into the mansion.”

“Ohh, ah well, that shouldn’t be a problem. We also prepared two backup plans, but they seem unnecessary now. After all, if he is bold enough to ignore us after seeing that, he would have left the capital long ago.”

“He might be old, but he still served as the Chief Chamberlain of the Emperor?”

“... It is clear by inspecting his accomplishments. He excels in his ability to observe subtle mood changes of the late Emperor. That’s why I judge that we should work on him first.”

“Is that so?”

There were others involved in Latreille's assassination of the Emperor. It wasn't a coincidence that they started here.

Shortly after, a butler came to the gate from within the mansion and spoke quietly to the guards.

As they predicted——

The soldiers granted entry through the main gate.

The butler with his perfectly waxed hair walked over, and said politely:

"Pardon me. I am Marquis Beclard's butler. You must be Prince Heinrich Trois Bastian de Belgaria. My Master requests for your permission to grant him a meeting."

"Since he invited me in, it would be a shame to turn him down."

Even though he himself wanted to enter the mansion, made so much preparation and came here personally, he still acted so arrogantly. As expected of royals.

The butler glanced at Regis.

"And this young lady is...?"

With his disguise on, it was only natural to get his gender wrong... But did he really look so young, Regis wondered. No, even if he got addressed as 'Madame' instead of 'Young Lady', it wasn't something to be happy about.

Bastian shrugged.

"She's my friend. She wanted to meet Beclard, so I brought her along. Well, it's fine if you don't let her in."

Regis bowed politely.

He then introduced his fake persona based on his alias.

"I am a reporter from Weekly Quarry, Regina Ottoman."

The butler's eyes twitched. Seems like the letter was working.

"... I see... Please come in——"

They were ushered to a living room with plenty of high class furniture.

Bastian sat on the leather couch.

“I wasn’t bothered by this at all in the past.”

“In reference to what?”

Regis’ gaze was completely drawn in by the books arranged on the shelves. Most of them were untouched and used for decoration, but there were rare books that couldn’t be found in bookstores.

“I mean such extravagance, which I really despise right now. If all these things are converted into money, how many commoner’s school fees could it pay for? Well, as a guy who fled from my home teacher multiple times, I think it’s too late for me to say this.”

“...Prince Bastian, it is never too late to start in life.”

“Hmm?”

“The human brain will continue to grow no matter how old you get. Be it memory or calculation speed, after training it into a habit, everyone can do it.”

“Isn’t it often said that old people tend to be forgetful?”

“Leaving illness aside... This is because people gradually don’t mind forgetting things as much, and their tension tends to fall. For people working with a lot of things to remember — for example, merchants or butlers, research tells us that their memory doesn’t differ too much at each age group. Instead of age, the performance of individuals is the biggest factor.”

“Huh——”

“If you regret not learning something in the past, you just need to start working hard on it now. It is never too late.”

“Ahh, that’s right. I heard something similar, but about muscles not deteriorating with age if you keep the training up, even if you already passed your best years.”

“E-Erm...”

“If you start training now, you should be able to wield a sword decently.”

“No... For me... It isn’t about age, but a matter of individual performance...”

“What, you are giving up on yourself?”

“... If I would delve into swordsmanship practice, I wouldn’t find the time time to read books right?”

“Ohh.”

The master of the mansion appeared with a knock on the door.

Regis already saw him at the Founding Day Festival, but he appeared to have aged quite a bit since then.

The man lowered his head.

“It’s been awhile, Prince Bastian.”

“Ahh, you are alive and energetic as always, Beclard.”

“The newspaper just now... The one Your Highness brought with you...”

He placed the item in his hand onto the table.

It had crease lines from being crumpled, but it was undoubtedly a weekly newspaper prepared by them.

Weekly Quarry Year 852 August 12th

The Emperor was assassinated!?

This rumor had been circulating from the very start. Many of the Emperor’s maids and servants had been dismissed, and either died from accidents or went missing. And every single one of them is still uncontactable which is quite unusual.

And the only information leaving His Majesty’s chamber was the news of the suicide of Imperial Consort Johaprecia supposedly in order to not leave his side even in death, given by Prince Latreille’s physician. Not even her own physician was allowed to investigate her cause of death and was denied entrance to the chamber.

This horrendous act of disrespect led to the deterioration of relations with the Estaburg Kingdom, the home nation of the Imperial consort. Despite this catastrophic diplomatic fallout, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Military Affairs Ministry and the Ceremonial Ministry all refused to give us a comment on this.

So the only accounts about that incident were given by the courts and if you choose to believe them, His Majesty had already passed on when Prince Latreille entered his chamber.

To get a second account of the incident, we conducted an independent interview, and finally obtained a testimony from someone with a neutral position within the courts.

According to Chief Chamberlain Marquis Beclard's testimony
——

When he entered His Majesty's chambers, he witnessed the Prince standing in a pool of blood with his sword drawn. What really happened in there, what exactly is the truth then!?

August 13th will be Prince Latreille's coronation, the time is near.

We hope that until then, those in the courts could clarify the circumstances of this shocking rumor before the new Emperor takes the throne in order to put the citizens at ease.

With the blessing of god, we hope that a just Emperor will be crowned.

“What's the meaning of this?”

Beclard's voice was trembling spitting the words through his clenched teeth.

Bastian shrugged as if this had nothing to do with him.

“It’s nothing much, I just brought it along since you might be interested since this is the newspaper that will be published tomorrow.”

“How is this possible! These are just fictitious lies!”

He even omitted his honorifics, and his words turned crude.

Everything was going according to plan.

Regis nodded:

“... Pardon me.”

“What the hell are you even doing here!? Is this the time for a woman to speak up!?”

“... I am Regina Ottoman... A reporter from Weekly Quarry. This is my employee pass.”

Although this was made haphazardly by the chief editor this morning.

Beclard’s white hair was a mess as he roared:

“So you are a part of that trashy third rate newspaper!? Don’t think there won’t be consequences for doing this!”

“... Personally, I am more worried about Marquis Beclard’s perilous position.”

“What!?”

“... People who read this article will think you provided the information, Marquis.”

“Impossible. Why would I leak this info!?”

“... You think Prince Latreille will believe you? Really?”

“Of course!”

Beclard said that so intensely that his face became twisted.

Bastian sneered:

“Are you serious? You took so much bribes, even bro had to give you money. You think he would trust you one bit?”

“Ugh... T-There’re no bribes...”

“You are still insisting on this now? I know plenty of people you had solicited bribes from though?”

They got this info through Fanrine and Carol’s intelligence network.

There were plenty of people who gave bribes, however that wasn’t about trust at all, but about gaining his favor.

Regis did his best to say in a calm tone:

“... Prince Latreille has an aggressive personality. He

definitely won't spare any traitors."

"I am not a traitor!"

"The one who will decide about that isn't you, but Prince Latreille."

"H-How could it come to this... But I didn't do anything!"

"That may be true. Just like the fact that your actions so far inevitably resulted in no one believing you anymore."

"Ugh!?"

The need to use such a man to legitimate his claim to the throne was Prince Latreille's weakness.

He was too hasty in forcing a checkmate.

Using chess as a metaphor, the check came too early, thus they had enough time to avoid the mate. That was the situation right now.

Regis wouldn't let this chance slip away.

The irrational order for Altina's unit to attack a fort, and the attempted assassination of Regis—— Their opponents didn't pull their punches at all, it didn't make sense for them to show any mercy when they were so close.

Regis said firmly:

“Prince Latreille will dispose of you. He will send you to some place far away under the pretense of retirement, and you will meet a fatal accident along the way... How many servants do you think got killed by this plan?”

Beclard's face turned green.

As if a sword was held against his throat, he kept trembling.

“I-It can't be helped. If I refuse, I will be killed too. B-Believe me, Prince Bastian! I served your father for 40 years! Faithfully!”

“You mean enriching yourself and abusing authority for 40 years? I will be direct—— If you are a just man, then the Empire wouldn't be in such a messy situation.”

“How could that be!?”

“Honestly speaking, I'm not interested about what will happen to you. Well, I will leave the rest to Regina. If you don't want to be murdered by bro, then listen to what she says.”

Beclard looked at Regis with pleading eyes.

Regis didn't like someone corrupted by greed either... But it would be terrible if Beclard got killed by Latreille.

“If this goes on, the Empire will be led down a despairing war path. To avoid that, I hope you can help us.”

“C-Can you guarantee... the safety of my life and fortune!?”

—— Fortune?

He is still worried about his fortune at a time like this?

“I made preparations for you to leave the capital... But we can't bring too much luggage. Wouldn't it be better to leave them here and survive?”

“U-Ughh... Guu...”

Beclard groaned.

After muttering to himself for some time.

“I understand... I will help you. I will forfeit... a part of my fortune then.”

“... I can guarantee your personal safety. A carriage will arrive in 30 minutes, please have the preparation to leave done by then.”

“W-Wait! Carriage!? That's impossible!”

“Why?”

He looked outside the window grudgingly.

“The soldiers aren't just here to protect me... but also to stop me from escaping.”

“That's true.”

“You got another idea right!? Some sort of backup plan right!? A strategy of some sorts!”

“Don’t worry, I made arrangements.”

However, Beclard still covered his face with both hands.

“Ahhh... It’s no good after all!”

“Hah...”

What was it now?

“I have a granddaughter... living in another house. I can’t abandon her and flee by myself...”

“We did investigate that side too. You didn’t bring it up earlier, I was wondering if you are concerned about her at all.”

“I don’t want that child to be implicated.”

“... Well, in that case—— instead of wealth, you should increase the number of comrades you can trust.”

“Ughhh... There are also soldiers sealing that house off. Do you really have a plan?”

Regis sighed.

“Seems like I have to count on you.”

He said looking to the side where Bastian stood up from the

couch.

“Leave it to me! How many soldiers are there?”

“According to the servants that frequent there, there are about ten heavy armoured soldiers keeping watch in that house.”

“Give me about 10 minutes to get it done”

“Sorry that you have to take such risk.”

“Are you kidding me? I won’t even break sweat for just 10 of them.”

“Please be careful anyway.”

“I do understand the dangers, don’t worry. I won’t ever let my guard down again.”

In order to get Beclard’s granddaughter out, Bastian confirmed where that house was from the windows in the corridor, then calmly walked over.

Beclard returned to his study room.

Regis followed him since. It was meaningless to stay in the living room anyway.

He stuffed documents from his vault into a travel bag whilst the butler quietly helped him from the side.

“Damn it... damn it... Why do I need to...!?”

“... Title deeds huh. If you run, Prince Latreille will freeze your assets though?”

“They’re hidden under different names! Money locked in vaults is worthless, it yields no interest. Money has to flow to bring in benefits.”

“I agree with your assessment.”

Regis picked up a contract that fell onto the floor.

“This is... a loan to a merchant?”

“To increase one’s wealth, the best way is to loan it out. The money I loaned to merchants amounts to more than the Emperor’s fortune!”

“Even though this money is obtained through bribes?”

“A lot of people started business with this money, or expanded their store. Isn’t this a charitable work!?”

“Instead of Chief Chamberlain, maybe you are more suited to be the Finance Minister.”

“Don’t be daft. What’s so good about increasing the country’s wealth? I’d rather increase my own wealth! What are you doing!? Put that bundle in another bag!”

“... Eh?”

“You said you will stop the Empire from heading down a warpath right!? Someone capable of that can’t be just a reporter!”

“O-Ohh...”

He was unexpectedly calm. When Beclard was involved with things related to money, he was full of life.

“No matter what the circumstances, money is the most important thing!”

“... Hah.”

“There is no pretty or dirty money! I promise you a share of everything that we can save! So pack it in quickly! The carriage will take this with us right!?”

“Hmm... Well, Prince Latreille will just use whatever we leave here anyway.”

A bag full of money wasn’t worth much for a large organization, but a bag full of title deeds would be a different matter.

Maybe they could receive aid from the merchants who improved their livelihood with his loans——

“Get out of my way——!!”

“Uwah!!”

The soldiers screamed.

Bastian stated his name, but none of the guards heard him.

Because he had them all knocked out already.

He already decided to not hold back and even kill if he needed to protect someone, but he would avoid doing so, if it wasn't necessary.

He kicked open the locked door and strolled into the house.

“Hmm, where is she? Damn, I already forgot her name... Hey, uhm granddaughter? Answer if you hear me——?”

He walked down the hallway until he heard singing from behind a door.

He called out first, but after waiting for a reply which didn't come, he kicked down the door.

“Hey, are you the granddaughter!?”

A woman about 20 years of age was inside the room leaning against the grille window and singing with a sharp voice.

She was a beauty, even though her nose resembled Beclard a little.

However...

She smiled upon seeing Bastian.

“Ara, Papa, are you looking for me?”

——Hey hey.

“Erm... Are you Beclard’s granddaughter?”

“Grandpa is here too?”

“We are leaving right away, pack your things. We won’t be coming back again, so pack them thoroughly.”

“Aha! Are we going out? Okay——!”

She only had a teddy bear in her hands——

A lot of citizens gathered outside the mansion in the meantime.

“Hey, explain this news to me!” “Get the Marquis out here!”

“He’s hiding in the mansion right!? Get out here now!”

The newspapers in their hands were similar to the one Regis showed to Beclard, with the testimony that Latreille assassinated the Emperor.

When they saw the report, the soldiers lost their aggression.

They still didn't let the citizens enter the grounds, but hesitated about using force to disperse the angry crowd.

They could emphasize with the angry citizens, since they also hoped for someone to clarify the circumstances—— This thought lingered in the air.

They swore fealty to Prince Latreille after all, and now the Chief Chamberlain testified that the Prince assassinated the Emperor. It was a grave matter.

One soldier yelled:

“The Marquis didn't leave the mansion! No reporters passed this entrance! Back off now! This must be a misunderstanding!”

“Are the missing maids still around then!?” “Is the incident with the 6th Consort's physician a lie!?”

“No idea! Go ask the Ceremonial Ministry and the press about that!”

“If that is the case, then Beclard is unforgivable!” “That's right!” “Drag him out from that mansion!”

They showed no fear even with the spearheads pointed at them. They seemed to be genuinely enraged.

It's no surprise that the soldiers got intimidated by the mass of infuriated people.

At this moment, a carriage rushed onto scene.

"Make way make way! This is the Imperial First Army! No mercy will be shown to any who blocks our path!"

It wasn't a military carriage, but they still roared as they chased off the people in their path and approached the gate.

The soldiers recovered and chased off the gathered citizens with their spears.

The carriage came to a stop right in front of the gate.

The driver leaned out.

"Orders from the top, we are to bring Marquis Beclard to the Le Branne palace!"

"Is that the Field Marshal's orders!?"

"No, it's the chief strategist's!"

The driver proffered a parchment after saying that.

The commander of the guards took the parchment. The written orders didn't even have a wax seal, but it did have Germaine's signature.

Judging from the current situation, the outraged citizens

might swarm in. So the chief strategist wanted to take the initiative?—— At least that was the commander's interpretation.

“Right! Open the gate! Be careful not to let anyone else slip in!”

The gate opened, and the carriage quickly moved inside the fenced area.

As if he just remembered something, a soldier asked:

“Why isn't it a military carriage?”

“That's...”

“Why use a normal carriage?”

“This is arranged by the chief strategist, I don't know why either.”

“... Is that so?”

The carriage passed through the gate, and steered along the driveway leading to the entrance——

As Prince Bastian was also on the carriage heading towards the palace, the soldiers didn't question them.

The citizens swarming the mansion also played an important

part, as shoohing them off already took all they had.

Inside the carriage——

Beclard's granddaughter sang happily which would be nice and all if it wasn't the wrong time to do so.

She would squat them when she spotted flowers, and disappear if you took your eyes off her for a moment. Thanks to her, Bastian looked exhausted.

"Hah... Bringing her to the carriage is more tiring than fighting the soldiers..."

Beclard kept his head down and additionally wore a black hood to keep people outside from seeing his face.

"W-What's with this commotion? Has that newspaper already been published?"

"Those gathered here are the friends of a certain Madame."

Bastian knocked the seat on the carriage as if he was trying to drown out Regis' words.

"But really now! The soldiers actually granted passage to the carriage!"

"Indeed... Why did the soldiers let the carriage through?"

Beclard was equally confused.

Regis wanted to scratch his head, but that would mess up his

wig, so he placed his hand back onto his knee.

“... Erm... Because I made a written orders to ‘Bring Marquis Beclard to the palace on Lord Germaine’s orders’.”

“Can you please stop joking around. Leaving militia from the boondocks aside, why would an officer from the Imperial First Army be deceived by such an order?”

“Haha... This the First Army’s bad habit... Field Marshal Latreille’s orders are always sealed with wax and handled carefully. However, Lord Germaine issued many orders on his behalf too. There was also an incident where he mobilized units by his own discretion.”

“Oh?”

“Latreille trusts his subordinate and permitted him to do so, but Lord Germaine’s orders were unexpectedly informal. It even reached the point that it would be accepted if the signature seemed to be genuine.”

Beclard tilted his head.

“What is going on? You forged a written order? That isn’t...”

“It’s not some amazing strategy right? I merely kept a copy of the orders I received from Lord Germaine, and mimicked his signature. I even knew what pen he used. If I get aid from friends in the press, making this is easy.”

“You actually...!?”

Beclard was shocked while Bastian laughed.

Regis shrugged.

“I almost got killed by them... taking some souvenirs in return isn’t too much.”

Beclard finally looked at him seriously for the first time.

“W-Who are... you...?”

“Haha... Although I’m dressed like this, I’m actually Regis d’Auric. I’m not with my unit right now, but I’m Princess Argentina’s strategist.”

“The Fourth Princess’ strategist!?”

“Well, the only faction that could stand against Prince Latreille would be her.”

“Hmmm...”

“Ah, and of course, this carriage won’t be heading to the palace—— Huh!?”

When they were about to leave the mansion grounds, the carriage suddenly slowed down.

The driver opened a small window and said:

“Boss! There are troops!”

“What!?”

Regis poked his head out the carriage window and looked forward. And so did Bastian.

Beclard held his granddaughter close, but she didn't react to the situation at all, still singing songs at this inopportune timing.

Knights formed up in front of them, as if they were flooding the roads. There were about 300 cavalry with their standard held up high.

“... Aren't that the White Hare Knights... Wah, Lord Batteran is here too.”

Regis mumbled.

Bastian pulled his head back and crossed his arms.

“This is bad. I'm not optimistic about fighting such a huge number of knights.”

“Hmm... They moved faster than I expected. They must have planned in advance for any unexpected incidents.”

“What should we do!?”

“... Well, they probably won't expect the Marquis to be on this carriage.”

“But she is really prominent right?”

Bastian pointed at the granddaughter. Although the army was approaching, she was still singing cheerfully out of the window.

Regis spoke to her with a voice as gentle as he could manage:

“Erm... Hey, do you know a story like this?”

“Hmm? What is it, Mama!?”

“Mama!? Ah, no... it’s... a story about three bear brothers.”

“Wah, Mr bear!”

An adult woman shouting like a child felt really strange.

He didn’t know the circumstances behind this—— But Regis told his tale gently as if he was narrating a fairy tale for a child.

Beclard’s granddaughter listened with sparkling eyes.

The carriage passed by the army, while the sound of armour clinking reverberated inside the carriage. Some knights were also staring into the carriage too.

Bastian wore his sunglasses, Regis was in women’s clothing as he told a fairy tale to the granddaughter passionately and Beclard wore his hood low, pretending to be asleep.

There were a few bags on the roof of the carriage making

screeching sounds.

The White Hare Knights——

Headed towards Beclard's mansion right through the sieging crowd, chasing them away without attacking.

—— We made it through huh.

Regis exhaled deeply.

The granddaughter tilted her head.

Bastian took off his sunglasses too.

“Phew~... We can go back to the press just like this right?”

“Yes, just as we planned, Mr Claude will interview the Marquis for his testimony, and we will publish a new report. One that isn't made up... Even so, this report will be a stunning attack.”

“This isn't just one blow, but an all out attack!”

“I need to let him know that this isn't an era where he can cover up the truth simply with his authority.”

“Oh!”

Beclard was still wearing his hood but quiet sobbing could be heard from underneath. Was it relieve for escaping this danger alive, or grieve for losing his status and most of his

wealth?

Regis mumbled:

“... It begins now, I finally have the pieces needed to attack.”

“What about Mr Bear’s story?”

He was forced to continue his story.

Chapter 5 - Wedge

The 12th was Monday, one day before the coronation and the day weekly newspaper went on sale.

Almost all the newspapers were singing praises of Prince Latreille.

However, the most prominent and popular paper was Weekly Quarry.

It reported the detailed testimony by Marquis Beclard on what happened on that fateful day. It also listed all the people involved in the assassination who were still in the courts.

There was no physical evidence.

However, the key staff of the late Emperor, the chief chamberlain who supported Prince Latreille was not inside his mansion. This was an indisputable fact.

And of course, news reached Latreille immediately.

Inside his office——

Germaine bowed his head low.

“My deepest apologies. The person who appeared in Marquis Beclard’s mansion seemed to have forged my written orders.”

Germaine's signature could be seen clearly on the parchment placed on the table.

Instead of the signature, Latreille stared at the content of the orders.

The handwriting was similar, but it was definitely written by someone else.

"After all, compared to my orders, you don't handle your orders as strictly."

"I have no excuse."

"Someone who knew our inner workings and could forge your signature... No, that's all in the past now. There aren't too many people who can do that."

"Yes."

"And it's a faction that doesn't welcome my coronation." He didn't say the name out loud, but the image of a certain person appeared clearly in both their minds.

"I finally understand the feeling of dissonance I felt back then, when I asked the knights who carried out the assassination for the details."

"Oh?"

"When the knights entered the tent, he was already dead... and missing his head."

Germaine said dejectedly. What a miscalculation.

Latreille smirked.

“Fu... a body double huh...”

“I am responsible for all of this. Not just once, but again... I let down Your Highness’ trust...”

“No, that night—— I heard the same report, but what did we do?”

“Eh? W-Well... We did a more thorough search...”

“We didn’t let our guard down. It is impossible to hike through the mountains without equipment and provisions—— That’s what we concluded, so we searched the area centered around the main roads. Since we didn’t find them back then, it means they hiked through the mountains.”

It would take two weeks for the roundabout trip through the mountains.

With the necessary provision, water and hiking gear, it would be a large amount of luggage. It was hard to imagine him preparing all these without attracting the attention of others.

“I-Indeed... We never thought he would target Marquis Beclard.”

“We already made the adequate preparations. One hundred soldiers are garrisoned there. But who would have thought he would forge a written orders in the midst of a commotion?”

“... Ugh.”

“In either case, it was my mistake for letting Beclard live. It’s only natural for him to attack my weak points.”

“Yes.”

“I can feel that his aim—— Is to pull me down completely.”

“I won’t let him get his way.”

“Yes, I won’t let him take shots at me so easily either. However, he did got us good this time. How big is the effect of this news spreading?”

Germaine groaned.

“... Some of the commoners criticize this vocally. But I think there are more people who are just confused.”

“What about the nobles?”

“It isn’t clear...”

“Don’t worry, and don’t hide the situation.”

“Ah, no! I don’t mean to hide anything, just that I couldn’t get a hold of their actions. It is very possible that some of the nobles will come seeking for an explanation.”

“... Is there anything else?”

“The Empress is missing.”

“Oh?”

She was busying herself with extravagant decors for the coronation earlier, but she had gone missing now.

If Latreille really assassinated the Emperor, then his mother the Empress might be implicated too. It seemed that she planned to flee before the dust settled.

Tomorrow would be the coronation, such a move was meaningless...

Latreille clenched his fist.

“If I can prove my innocence, then everything will be fine right?”

“Yes.”

“No matter what others says, my words carry the most weight. No need to panic.”

“Of course!”

“But if the grand nobles betray us, it might result in a civil war. We can’t waste time and troops here.”

“I will strengthen surveillance!”

“Good.”

If Latreille becomes Emperor, he won't need to worry about factions. Because the entire nation would be under his rule.

However, there were nobles who value morale and tradition over their own interest.

"... Had a wedge been struck into the wall?"

"Huh?"

"No, my advantage and my goal remains the same. This is like a journey to a distant land. There would naturally be rain and storms."

"Even so, we won't stop advancing."

"Yes, we have reached the final stretch."

Latreille nodded.

Tomorrow——

The Emperor would finally be coronated.

"... No matter what you do, it is already too late."

The door to his office was knocked.

Germaine replied after confirming with Latreille.

“Enter!”

The door opened and a soldier stood at attention and saluted.

“Reporting! The Imperial Fourth Army is sighted on the eastern main road!”

“What? Are they heading towards the capital?”

“They are! There are 500 cavalry as vanguard and 4,000 infantry half a day’s march behind them!”

They weren’t too many.

However, about half of the Fourth Army was despatched to the eastern frontlines. If that unit was mobilized too, that could mean reinforcements.

They were actually marching towards the capital without orders!

“Just what is Argentina thinking!?”

“It’s because of that strategist huh?”

“Yes...”

From that incident with the weekly newspaper, that strategist was probably alive.

But that was just speculation.

Then Argentina must have led her army here because she couldn't accept his death.

—— *How childish!*

It was frustrating, but he wanted to avoid civil war as much as possible.

He just got the report from Germaine that the nobles' movements were unclear.

Aside from the First Army and Imperial Guards, there were also the Noble's army within the capital. If he couldn't tell what the commanders were thinking, it would be dangerous to mobilize their units.

If they turned on him, Latreille couldn't avoid defeat despite having several folds their numbers.

If he arranged the formation such that it was wary of any betrayal, that would be openly declaring his distrust of the commanders.

Latreille clenched his fists tightly.

—— *Do we need to start a civil war against a rebel army? Fools. If we lose more people in civil warfare, we won't be able to stop the invasion of other nations! Just what are they thinking!?*

Germaine gasped.

"Your Highness what are your orders!?"

“Sortie! Sortie the First Army!”

“Yes Sir!”

“A knight corps came out of the capital! It’s the First Army’s ‘White Hare Knights’!”

Abidal Evra reported loudly.

Altina nodded and raised a hand.

“All units halt! Form up on this hill!”

Bugles sounded and the horses stopped. The infantry would catch up half a day later.

Under normal circumstances, advancing by matching the pace of the infantry was standard, but Altina’s anxiousness resulted in this unusual march.

“Will they charge us...?”

Eric said quietly.

It was unlikely for the battle to start before any interaction, but he only expressed his uneasiness because of the First Army’s pressure.

Altina placed her hand on the sword hanging on the side of her horse.

“If they come at us, I will kill them all!”

“Hah, haha...”

Eric laughed dryly.

Did she give a sense of being reliable, or reckless...?

The White Hare Knights was one of the strongest knights corps of the Empire. Be it training, numbers or equipment, the other side had the advantage.

However, she didn't give off her usual feeling of bravery, but the aura of the strong.

Imperial Year 851, August 12th, evening——

The Fourth Army formed up on the hill to the east. They had 500 cavalry and 4,000 infantry.

To counter, the First Army formed up at the foot of the hill. 1000 cavalry and 10,000 infantry.

Although the First Army had better training, equipment and numbers than the Fourth Army, their victories in the war against High Britannia was well known.

On the eve of the festival, the capital was shrouded in a tense atmosphere.

Special Chapter - Altina's Part Time Job

“Let's study economics today.”

Clarisse said.

It was morning, and the place was the personal chambers of the Commander of Fort Volks.

Regis headed to the capital alone, and Altina led the unit back to their base. After that, she wanted to study—— As she read books that were right for her level, she received strict swordsmanship instruction at the same time.

Her teacher was the maid Clarisse.

Unlike normal maids, Clarisse was well educated. Regis even acknowledged that she was capable of discussing economical and religious topics.

Altina sat before her desk and looked at the books stacked on top of it.

“I have to read all this?”

“You are not motivated? Let’s stop studying then.”

“Eh?”

Hufufu, Clarisse smiled.

“Your Highness is the one who wanted to do this, it has nothing to do with me. Your Highness is the one who will be troubled in the future...”

“Ugh...”

“Even so, that would be the Princess’ choice. No matter what, the Princess will be my most important person.”

“I will do it! I will do it alright!? It’s just economics! I will read it no matter how many books there are! Tch, come at me book!”

“... Books won’t come at you. And this will probably turn into napping time like last time, so let’s have a practical lesson.”

Altina blushed after being pointed out that she fell asleep before finishing even one book.

“Okay, I will leave it to you then.”

“Alright. Well then——”

Clarisse clapped her hands and proposed another plan.

“Then for today, Your Highness will start a business in Fort Volks~”

“Ehh... Business huh...”

Altina didn't really get what that meant, but was still intrigued.

She leaned forward.

“Speaking of which, I haven't earned any money before.”

“... Well... Your Highness is a Lieutenant General of the Imperial Army and the commander of the Fourth Army. Your monthly salary is 150,000 Deniers. By the way, when Regis was a Fifth Grade Admin Officer, his weekly wages was 200 Deniers.”

“Hmm.”

After his promotion to Third Grade Admin Officer, he would have subordinates and his salary increased to 8,000 Deniers a month. First Grade Admin Officer would be paid 40,000 Deniers—— 50 times that of a Fifth Grade Admin Officer.

Altina shook her head.

“I do have the salary of a Lieutenant General. But I didn’t become a soldier through hard work, but was bestowed this position by Latreille right?”

“That’s true.”

It was a position many aspire to be but would never reach. But because she was a princess, she got the rank of Major General in spite of her wishes.

It wasn’t fair, but that was the current system in the Empire. Although rising to the rank of Lieutenant General was the result of Altina’s actions...

“I don’t know how it feels to earn money through my own efforts. Although I do need to be a commander in order to be Emperor.”

“That’s right... Soldiers are a very special type of occupation. If you want to learn about economics, it would be better to gain experience in other jobs.”

“That sounds interesting! That’s the best way of learning for me!”

Altina smiled brilliantly.

Clarisse was smiling too.

“Well then, let’s start by trying to be a maid.”

And so, it turned out like this.

Fort Volks, Officer’s Mess——

Altina lifted one side of her skirt and twirled one round.

“Chiang chiang~!”

The skirt full of laces fluttered with Altina’s movements.

Eehee, a smile appeared on her face.

Clarisse was mesmerized.

“Ahh... How cute, Your Highness is really cute.”



“Maid attire is not like dresses. It is easy to move in, I like it!”

“It suits you very well.”

“Fufu, is that so?”

“It’s a pity we can’t show this to Regis.”

“That’s true——”

Altina suddenly stood stiffly and immediately blurted out without thinking:

“W-W-Why did you mention Regis!? What has my clothes have to do with Regis!?”

“Ara ara, let’s leave it at that for now.”

“Muuu...”

“Well then, let’s start with cleaning the tables.”

“Leave it to me!”

“Ah—— Use this.”

What Clarisse prepared for her was a wig.

It was long black hair with long fringes.

It was put onto Altina, narrowing her vision slightly.

“Hmm? What are you doing?”

“If the Princess cleaned the dining hall in maid’s clothing, it would be detrimental to the dignity of the commander. Please put on a disguise.”

“Ah... I see. Well, it’s for the sake of studying. If anyone dare look down on me, I will smack them up. But it’s better to not surprise everyone.”

“Yes. You will be the new maid Alina then!”

“Whatever. Let’s start cleaning now.”
Clarisse tilted her head.

“You are the new maid Alina now, right?”

“Hmm?”

“I am your senior Clarisse.”

“... Hmmmmm?”

“Where’s your greeting?”

Clarisse was still smiling, but she gave of a scary aura now.

Altina was a little slow, but she finally noticed:

“Ah right—— Erm, please take care of me...?”

“Yes, well done. Remember to use honorifics to the officers okay?”

“I get it, no—— I understand.”

So she needed to start using honorifics and greetings huh—— Altina nodded. Now that she thought about it, there wasn't any maid who spoke crudely.

I learned something, Altina thought.

She drew a bucket of water from the well, and soaked her rag. By the way, the rag was made from worn clothes.

As it was a rag, it would break apart if she used too much strength.

When Altina broke one, Clarisse chided her immediately.

She started wiping the tables again.

“Hmm—— how dirty.”

“That's why everyone wipes twice.”

“That's true.”

All the food was served on large plates inside the Officer's mess. The portions were large, but there weren't any leftovers. Unlike the etiquette and delicate table manners of the courts, there was only war here.

Fights would even break out sometimes.

After wiping half the tables, a rowdy group entered.

There were about ten knights.

“Fuahhh! Maids, give me a meal!”

Clarisse bowed. When others were around, she would not smile.

“So early?”

Clarisse who was bowing glared at her sideways... Altina bowed quickly too.

The knights sat down.

“Because Sir Abidal Evra ordered us to recon the Fahrenberg territories, so we are here to have dinner beforehand!”

The other knights shrugged.

“It will already be late into the night when we get back.”

“Tch! He is acting like he is some great knight commander. Aside from the general and Evrard, Sir Kruger was strongest.”

The general—— Jerome had left to reinforce the east with the Black Knights.

As Evrard was the Fort Commander, he didn't have direct

command of the cavalry.

Kruger had already died in battle. He was a veteran of the Black Knights, and was highly evaluated.

Right now—— Abidal Evra was the first generation Knight Commander of the newly formed 'Flying Sparrow Knights', reporting directly to the Fourth Army Commander Altina.

They numbered 500.

They were a combination of new recruits, remnants of other units and former mercenaries. They were still lacking in both training and loyalty.

They seemed dissatisfied with the Knight Commander Abidal Evra who didn't have much accomplishments.

They vented their trivial complaints.

Guu... Altina clenched her fist.

—— No.

They were not like her. Be it the ambition to be Empress or the goal of making the Empire a nation of peace, those were just personal aspirations, not something shared with her subordinates.

Someone like Regis who understood her was special.

Soldiers weren't her limbs, but an organization made up of

people. They had their own desires, fear, objectives, preferences and position.

She needed to pay attention to this.

Altina wasn't mature as a commander, but she wasn't stupid. She could accept values that differed from her own.

She couldn't get angry because they were unhappy, resolving their dissatisfaction was her responsibility.

— *That might be so, but this is difficult. The one in command of the Black Knights is that Jerome afterall.*

He was one of the few heroes of the Empire, and kept the knights and troops in line with intimidation.

Asking Abidal Evra to do this will be too cruel. He was just a very competent knight with good common sense.

— *If I performed better, would the knights be more willing to follow Abidal Evra's command? Or is there another way?*

What would Regis do if he was here?

"Alina, don't daze off now."

Altina was shocked by the sudden voice.

"Eh!? M-M-Me?"

Clarisse handed her a large tray.

“Yes, please take this. There are still a lot more.”

“Uwah... Is that so... I have to serve them the dishes huh...”

Altina wasn't the commander today, but a maid.

With the large tray in hand, she walked towards the knights.

They were chatting about other things cheerfully. Such as the shops they visited while on leave.

One of the knights said with disgust:

“Just my luck to visit that shop! There isn't any good chicks there!”

“Fool, you are just unlucky. Jenny from that shop is the best!”

“Hahahaha!? That woman who is heavier than a horse?”

“That's the best part! Fool! You can't appreciate——”

“Don't wanna, I prefer girls who are more toned. Speaking of which, that's the kind of feel.”

The knights shifted their gaze to Altina who was carrying a large tray.

—— *Are they talking about cafes?* Altina thought.

Mimicking the silent Clarisse, she placed the tray onto the table quietly. She had been issuing commands to the troops

all these time, it would be bad if she revealed her identity because she spoke.

“.....”

“Hey, I have never seen you around before. You new here?”

A knight asked.

What should I do?

She looked towards the kitchen, and saw Clarisse clench her fist. Was she asking Altina to work hard?

Today’s lesson was economics and experiencing how to conduct business. This was part of her job.

Altina nodded and answered softly, mindful of her volume.

“... Yes.”

She was always ordering the troops around with a loud voice. Altina judged that she wouldn’t be exposed if she used such a calm voice.

One of the knights licked his lips.

“That’s great, I like you. Please take care of me from now on.”

“... Yes.”

“If possible, take care of me at night too.”

“...?”

He mean dinner huh.

When Altina was thinking that—— The knight reached his hand out with a smile.

“Hehehe.”

Her butt was groped. It was done through her skirt, but Altina’s back still tensed.

Crack! Altina’s chest heated up.

“Bitch... what are you doing!”

She kicked without thinking.

The knight flew all the way to the wall.

“Hack!?”

His back hit the wall, and made the sound of a frog being squished.

Bloop bloop, he was foaming at the mouth.

The other knights stood up agitatedly.

“What.. What is with this maid!?”

All of them drew their swords.

Altina threw the wig on her head away.

“You idiot! How dare you touch a girl’s body, this is an outrage! Even if the gods forgive you, I won’t!”

The knights were petrified.

Forgiveness or whatnots, the subject was already knocked out after being kicked to the wall.

Also, the girl who they thought was a maid——

They said with a quivering voice:

“... Crimson eyes and vermillion hair...? Could... Could it be... The Princess!?”

“That’s right! If you forget my face, I won’t let you forget again with my fist! En garde!”

“W-We won’t dare!”

All the knights knelt.

The commander was a royal. If they brandish their blades at her, they wouldn’t just be guilty of treason, but also lese’ majeste.

And this girl did something unimaginable despite her slender appearance—— She won a duel against the Black Knight Jerome, and defeated the Mercenary King.

Recently, she seemed to be practicing against the Emperor Sword Eddie Fabio de Balzac everyday.

All the knights prostrated before her.

“O-Our deep apologies——!!”

Fuu, Altina crossed her arms.

“You lot have been doing that to the maids all along?”

“Absolutely not! We won’t do that! Just now... that... that guy just lost his head, or maybe his hand slipped... and did something unforgivable for a knight! Please spare his life!”

“You have lots of complaints about my unit?”

“Ah, no... absolutely not! We swear our loyalty by our swords! On our very lives!”

“I see, I will believe you since you said that much. Use your results on the battlefield to redeem your shameful actions.”

“Thank you very much!”

The knights bow deeply as if they were falling forward.

Sigh... Altina sighed deeply.

She returned to the kitchen.

Clarisse frowned with a complicated expression. The other maids looked the same.

“Your Highness...”

Altina shrugged:

“Their attitude changed when they realized it was me, how troubling.”

“Your actions are troubling too Your Highness. There are no maids who will send someone flying because her butt got groped.”

“Eh!?”

“That’s just like a greeting.”

The other maids behind Clarisse showed a face as if this couldn’t be helped. This happened a lot.

“N-No way! This is too unreasonable! I can’t forgive this!”

“This is our job.”

“How could this be...”

Clarisse closed one eye in a wink.

“Well, but... that was nicely done~?”

The other maids also laughed out loud.

“Thank you Your Highness.” “I'm glad that you got angry for us.” “I’m so touched.”

Everyone gave their thanks.

As expected, they didn’t feel happy about this.

Altina promised them she will issue an order to prohibit ‘molesting the maids’.

Clarisse patted the Princess’ head.

“Fufufu, you worked hard, Princess.”

“Wait... that tickles. Don’t do that, Clarisse~”

“But you fail as a maid.”

“Eh?”

“You are fired... alright?”

“Ehh!?”

She was urged to look at the dining hall. The knights didn’t touch the dishes, and remained genuflected. That one knight was still unconscious.

It is impossible to be a maid after creating such a mess.

This time, Clarisse led Altina to the store inside Fort Volks.

The numerous shelves inside the spacious room displayed the merchandise.

“Do you know? Luxury goods are sold here. Such as desserts, pretty clothes, and the books Sir Regis loves.”

“Oh——”

“I buy the tea leaves Your Highness drinks here too.”

“Oh I see.”

“After all, it’s meaningless to have salaries but nowhere to spend it.”

“I got it.”

Especially for Fort Volks located at the borders. Even the closest town Tuonvell was a day’s journey back and forth.

That’s why this shop was large with a wide variety of goods.

There were many staff too.

“The merchandise here are from the Tuonvell merchant guild and the southern merchant guild. Their staff are sent from there too.”

The southern merchant guild refers to the ‘the council of Gaillard's garden’ formed by the southern new nobles. Which was the group formed with Duke Tiraso Laverde at the core.

With several thousand soldiers, if you add in the servants, it could rival a city. They set up commerce here because of the privilege they received too.

Regis selected people who would receive permission and set the rules for operating their shops here, although the details were unknown...

They went deep inside the shop under Clarisse lead.

“Well then, you will work as an employee here this time.”

“Yes.”

“Sales of merchandise is the basics of business, and the heart of economics. Please learn well.”

“I know.”

“Don’t kick the customers okay?”

“No problem! If they reach out their hand, I will slap it away before they touch me!”

“... Well, that’s fine.”

Altina wore the uniform they bought.

It was clear with a glance at her striped shirt that she was an employee. She wore a hat with the same stripe pattern.

—— This appearance made her feel tense.

She wore her wig as a disguise as usual.

“Pleased to meet you! I am a new employee Alina! Please guide me along!”

She got much more used to it.

Her senior pointed to the entrance.

“Well, Alina, a customer is here. Let’s greet him——
Welcome!”

“Yes. Welcome!”

A soldier took two snacks from the shelf and headed to the counter.

“What is the difference between these two?”

Even if he asked her that, Altina wouldn’t know.

—— *What should I do?*

Altina who didn’t have any experience in buying things, much less product knowledge turned stiff. The employee besides her gave a detailed explanation.

Simply put, they taste different.

The soldier pointed to one and said: “I’ll take this one then.”

The employee replied: “One denier please.”

After leaving one copper coin, the soldier left with the merchandise.

The employee bowed to the back of the soldier and said: “Thank you for your patronage.”

She then placed the unsold item back on the shelf.

—— *One denier!?*

Bow, explanation about the product, inform the price, bow again, tidy up the shelf—— All that for one denier!

Its 1/500,000th her own salary.

Altina studied the copper coin they received closely.

“Doing business... Is not simple!”

After lunch, noon——

A man who looked a bit indecent came into the shop.

He then gave a snack to Altina who was standing besides the shelf.

“I want this.”

You should make payment at the counter—— Altina thought, but she still replied:

“Erm... That will be one denier please.”

“Too expensive. How about two of them for one denier?”

“Hm?”

Did she miscalculated? Altina looked to her senior with this in mind, and her senior crossed her fingers to form a small ‘X’.

She finally noticed, this was bargaining.

That thing Regis often did to merchants.

“Erm... I don’t think that is possible.”

“No no no, think about it. It’s thanks to the efforts of us soldiers that you can operate a shop here. It’s fine to sell just a snack or two cheaper right?”

“But...”

She turned back and the store employee still showed her an ‘X’.

That was only natural.

They only earn one denier for every snack they sold.

It was really difficult to earn that copper coin.

If she sold two snacks for one denier, that would mean giving one of it away for free.

They couldn’t take such a loss.

“No.”

“Why you wench! I am a soldier! I protect this fort! This——”

He cursed out with terms Altina didn’t even know.

After showing such an ugly sight——

The man threw the merchandise onto the ground.

“Who will want to visit this damn place again!?”
Pluck! A string inside Altina’s head broke again.

Another person flew to the wall. This time, she used her fist.

As the store employee thanked Altina, she promised to
‘prohibit verbally abusing store employees during
bargaining’.

Clarisse patted Altina’s head again.

“Fufufu, you worked hard, Princess.”

“Ugh... But... That guy went too far right? I think I did the
right thing though?”

“Yes, you are right. But as an employee, you will still be fired
though?”

“How could this be——”

Under the watchful gaze of all the staff, Altina headed to the next location.

“You will be working in a church next.”

“... This is economics? Isn't this religion?”

“Churches in the Empire also perform bank savings and loans services. But there are some infuriating people who don't return the money they borrow. Your job this time is to get money back from such people.”

“Why aren't they returning the money they borrowed? How troublesome.”

“That's right. This is the list of people who had missed repayment for a long time. Ara ara, there are officers on here. Let's start from the big fry.”

“Okay...”

In the end, she threw the fools who refused to pay their debts onto the walls.

Altina slouched her shoulders.

“Hah...”

Clarisse was patting her head again.

“Fufufu, Princess, the priest is very grateful for your help.”

“I guess so...”

She would withhold a part of their salary as payment towards the debts they owed—— She made such a promise with the church.

Altina looked at Clarisse begrudgingly:

“... But you are still going to fire me right?”

“Yes♪”

Dinner time...

Altina returned to the officers mess and leaned onto a wooden chair.

“Fuah! I’m beat!”

“Ara ara, that’s a rare sight Your Highness.”

“This is more tiring than sparring practice against the Emperor’s sword (Eddie) and the Mercenary King (Gilbert)!”

“Fufufu... It will be dinner soon. Would you like some tea before that?”

“Thank you. Ah no, just water will be fine.”

“Hmm?”

Altina said with a wry smile:

“So tea leaves are that expensive. I already know the price, but it didn’t feel real to me... And it could be gotten very easily in the courts—— No, what I didn’t understand was... the value of money. I never knew that working is so hard. Just earning one denier took so much effort...”

“Yes.”

“Thank you Clarisse. It must have been hard on you all this while.”

“I’m already used to it.”

“Earning money is really hard.”

“Because you need to complete the tasks requested by others.”

“Yes, being needed by others is really amazing!”

“I’m glad you learned something today.”

Altina nodded firmly.

“I think this is the most important thing I learned! I want to be someone needed by others too!”

“Fufu... Your Highness is already a commander they need alright?”

“I hope that is true... I wonder how the soldiers of the Fourth Army thinks...?”

“Not just the people in this fort, all the citizens in the country looks forward to Your Highness’ performance.”

“Ah... Is that so?”

During the war with High Britannia, they placed hope on her to stop the enemy invasion.

And now, they were depending on her to protect the Empire from the Germanian Federation.

Altina looked at her hand closely.

“I always wanted to be Empress, and to change the Empire— That might be so, but the role I’m playing right now is also needed by many others.”

“Yes.”

Clarisse patted her head again.

But unlike before, her hands were really gentle.

Altina felt itchy, but still entrusted her body over comfortably. She said cajolingly.

“Hmmp... You’re still treating me like a kid.”

“Hufufu.”



Kaka, burly officers walked briskly into the mess.

It was dinner time after all, so it wasn't strange for the officers to come here. But they were all walking towards Altina with a serious expression. There were twenty of them, which was a bit much.

"E-Excuse me!"

"Hmm? Something happened? Is it movement from the Germanian Federation!?"

"No! The vicinity around the fort is peaceful and quiet! Actually, we heard that Your Highness is conducting business."

"Eh...? A-Ahaha... Well, erm, I'm learning about it?"

The officers then took off their shirts

That surprised Altina.

"W-What are you all doing!?"

The half naked officers said together in a loud voice:

"Your Highness! We heard that if we pay, you will provide the service of hitting us!" x3

"I'm not doing that kind of business!"

Gugu... Clarisse was holding back her laughter by pressing onto her mouth. It was so funny that she was in tears.

“Pfft... Fu, fufu... How about it, Princess? They are requesting for you to work. Look there are so many of them.”

“Please hit us!” x3

“I am not doing—— that sort of business———!”

Appendix: The World of Altina the Sword Princess

fabrication de l'acier 3

Digging up iron ore from mines and refining them into iron was known as smelting.

As explained previously, the fuel used for smelting was coke, and steam engine was used to pump air in.

Pig iron were made by using blast furnace.

As coke was used in the process, there were 4% carbon in the iron, so it had a lower melting point. It could be shaped by pouring it into casts.

It was easy to mass produce items from pig iron, and it was cheaper than copper. And so, iron weapons and farm tools became more widespread, and changed people's lives.

However, pig iron had a big flaw. It was too brittle and cracks easily. It couldn't be used to make items that were too big.

In this era, pig iron was already used to forge cannons, but bronze cannons were still more sturdy and reliable. Although pig iron products had the advantage of being cheaper than bronze items.

(In this work, the cannons used by the Empire were made from bronze. Swords and armour were forged by blacksmiths, this was different from the norm of ironwork history.)

During mass production, people started thinking of ways to remove the carbon in pig iron.

And that was by stirring in a reverberatory furnace.

Coke was burned in the firebox, and the radiated heat would be reflected by the red brick ceiling (Back then, furnaces were built with red bricks) onto the pig iron. It burned the carbon and remove it from the pig iron (decarbonization).

However, the heat radiated from above, so heat couldn't be transferred through convection. The bottom would become cold.

That was why a rod would be inserted into the hearth to stir the pig iron in a boat rowing movement.

As stirring needed to be done manually, the production rate was lower—— but it was possible to forge wrought iron with low carbon and impurities content (carbon content below 0.02%).

The mass produced wrought iron was the building material for giant towers, and also used in locomotives, steamships and railroads. Cannons made from wrought iron also had better performance than bronze.

A hundred years later, new inventions allowed the mass production of steel with the appropriate amount of carbon

content (0.02% - 2.1%). But before that—— wrought iron was the driving force behind industrial production.

Volume 11 End

覇権の皇妃
アルティマ
読んでくださってありがとうございます

♡
Digen

今回は、病気のため、
待つてくださった読者の
みなさま、
むらさきさん、担当の
和田さん、
大変ご迷惑をおかけ
しました...。
そして今回もごめ
なさいませいただきます。
ありがとうございます。



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